

**FOREST INSECTS, PERSONHOOD AND THE
ENVIRONMENT: *HARURWA* (EDIBLE STINKBUGS) AND
CONSERVATION IN SOUTH-EASTERN ZIMBABWE**

MUNYARADZI MAWERE

(MWRMUN001)

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Supervisors:

A/PROF. LESLEY GREEN

DR. FRANK MATOSE

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Signature.....

Date.....

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	vi
List of Acronyms and Abbreviations.....	ix
Instruments.....	xi
Glossary of terms.....	xiv
INTRODUCTION: Setting the Research Agenda.....	1
Background to environment conservation and insects debates in Zimbabwe.....	13
<i>Harurwa</i> in Zimbabwe.....	21
Why <i>harurwa</i> ?.....	22
Research questions.....	23
The importance of studying humans and other beings relationships.....	24
Theoretical framework of the study.....	25
CHAPTER 1: Fieldwork site background and methodological issues.....	28
Entering the fieldwork site.....	28
Study area: Norumedzo Communal Area.....	31
The governance or administrative context in Norumedzo.....	37
Ethnographic and methodological approaches.....	43
<i>Selection of site and participants</i>	45
<i>Multispecies ethnography</i>	47
Specific research methods.....	49
Justification.....	57
Ethical considerations of the study.....	63

Organisation of the dissertation.....	65
 CHAPTER 2: <i>Harurwa</i> and the challenge of the <i>jiri</i>	68
Introduction.....	68
The Norumedzo <i>Jiri</i>	68
Understanding <i>harurwa</i>	74
Ritual ceremonies and cultural beliefs associated with <i>harurwa</i>	82
Post-humanities perspective in conservation and the conservation problems in Zimbabwe: A critique.....	89
Challenging conservation in Zimbabwe.....	95
 CHAPTER 3: Personhood, stories on <i>harurwa</i> origins and social networks: Relationalities and conservation practices in the Norumedzo.....	98
Introduction.....	98
Ethnographic accounts of personhood in Norumedzo Communal Area.....	99
The origins of <i>harurwa</i> in Norumedzo.....	106
<i>Nemeso discovered harurwa</i>	108
<i>Nemeso's mother, Mbepo, discovered harurwa</i>	109
<i>Nemeso's mysterious powers caused harurwa</i>	110
<i>Vanhu, zvisikwa</i> , ontology and relations in Norumedzo community.....	115
Relational networks and conservation practices in the Norumedzo community.....	120
 CHAPTER 4: Social tensions, village politics and natural resource conservation in the Norumedzo communal area.....	126
Introduction.....	126
The complexity of conflicts in the Norumedzo community.....	128
Causes of village tensions and conflicts in Norumedzo Communal Area.....	132
Potential threats and visible impacts of chieftainship succession conflicts and politics on the conservation culture in Norumedzo.....	141

CHAPTER 5: <i>Harurwa</i> and <i>jiri</i>, social networks and management practices: The opportunities and challenges of Norumedzo <i>Jiri</i> conservation.....	149
Introduction.....	149
<i>Harurwa</i> and the perceived challenges of the <i>jiri</i> conservation culture to the Norumedzo Community.....	149
Perceived opportunities opened up by the Norumedzo <i>Jiri</i>.....	159
<i>Livelihoods, poverty alleviation and social networking.....</i>	<i>160</i>
<i>Fight against land degradation</i>	<i>163</i>
<i>Aesthetic, cultural and educational values.....</i>	<i>166</i>
<i>The harurwa economy in Zimbabwe and the Southern African region.....</i>	<i>167</i>
CONCLUSION: Theoretical contribution and evaluation of the study.....	174
<i>Insights about environmental conservation and community management of forests.....</i>	<i>174</i>
<i>Contributing to the anthropological shift.....</i>	<i>175</i>
<i>Insights about harurwa.....</i>	<i>177</i>
Implications of the study.....	178
<i>Implications for natural resource management in rural communities.....</i>	<i>178</i>
<i>Implications for academics in conservation sciences.....</i>	<i>179</i>
<i>Implications for further research on natural resource conservation in rural communities.....</i>	<i>180</i>
Validity and reliability of the findings.....	181
<i>Credibility.....</i>	<i>181</i>
<i>Dependability.....</i>	<i>182</i>
Limitations of the study.....	183
Bibliography.....	185

Abstract

This study critically examines the possibilities for the mutual, symbiotic coexistence of human beings, biological organisms (a unique species of insects), and natural forests in a specific environment, Norumedzo, in the south-eastern region of rural Zimbabwe. Based on ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in the aforementioned region between December 2011 and December 2012, the study interrogates the enlightenment modernist paradigmatic oppositions such as science versus indigenous knowledge and nature versus culture and as such forms part of a major epistemological shift in Anthropology towards rethinking the binaries created by enlightenment modern thought which have for so long served to confine anthropological attention to the social. The study advances the argument that modernist divides/binaries are artificial and impede understanding of environmentalities, especially of relationships between social ‘actors’ in any given space, given that mutual relationships and interactions between humans and other beings as well as between diverse epistemologies are an effective proxy of nurturing ‘sustainable’ conservation.

The study demonstrates how some aspects of the emerging body of literature in the post-humanities and relational ontologies can work to grasp the collaborative interactional space for different social “actors” in the environment through which knowledge communities can be extended. Given that the post-humanities approach advanced in this work focuses attention on relationships among people, animals, ancestors, and things, it rethinks the enlightenment modernist division of the world into subjects and objects, that is, into humans and things. Rethinking those divisions enables fresh conversations between the [Western] sciences and other knowledge forms especially indigenous epistemologies. In this study, the rethinking of those divides is facilitated by an anthropological exploration of the social interconnectedness and mutual interdependence of rural Zimbabweans, forest insects known as edible stinkbugs (*harumwa* in vernacular) and the natural forests which, in fact, are critical to understanding the eco-systemic knowledges upon which livelihoods of many rural Zimbabweans are hinged.

Finally, this study raises critical questions for conservation sciences and environmental anthropology. And, unlike much of the scholarship on Zimbabwe’s conservation discourses, the study examines the interdependence of humans and the different kinds of beings in the cosmos, and demonstrates the extent of relevance and application of the Norumedzo conservation case study, particularly to issues of addressing conservational problems and asymmetrical relations between

humans and other beings, to other scenarios in Zimbabwe and beyond. Drawing together scholarship on post-humanities, relational ontologies and African cosmology, the dissertation argues for collaborative practices between humans and other actors in the environment in order to rethink the division between Western scientific conservation epistemologies and [African] indigenous conservation epistemologies, with a view toward enabling realisation of collective conservation goals.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AGRITEX	Agricultural, Technical and Extension Services
AOA	Actor Oriented Approach
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resources Management
ACCORD	African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes
ANT	Actor Network Theory
CAMPFIRE	Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources
CEAD	Centre for Environment and Development
CLA	Communal Lands Act
DA	District Administrator
DAO	District Administration Office
DEO	District Education Officer
ECM	Environment Conservation Monitor
EFCC	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
EISA	Energy Independence and Security Act
EMA	Environmental Management Agency
GNU	Government of National Unity
GZNM	Great Zimbabwe National Monument
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICPC	Independent Corrupt Practices Commission
IKS	Indigenous Knowledge System
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LAA	Land Apportionment Act
LDC	Local District Council
MDC	Movement for Democratic Party
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Party – Tsvangirai Faction
MDC-M	Movement for Democratic Party – Mutambara Faction
MLG	Minister of Local Government

MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NMMZ	National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe
NRM	Natural Resource Management
OoP	Office of the President
OCBNRM	Organic Community-Based Natural Resource Management
PCAA	Provincial Councils and Administration Act
PM	Prime Minister
RDCA	Rural District Councils Act
RDDC	Rural District Development Committee
SA	South Africa
SDC	School Development Committee
STS	Science and Technology Studies
TCA	Thematic Content Analysis
TLA	Traditional Leaders Act
UCT	University of Cape Town
US\$	United States Dollar
UZ	University of Zimbabwe
VIDCO	Village Development Committee
WADCO	Ward Development Committee
WC	Ward Committee
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
ZANU (PF)	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZBC	Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation
Z\$	Zimbabwean Dollar
ZDID	Zimbabwe Department for International
Development ZNEPS	Zimbabwe National Environment Policy and Strategies

ZNLWVA	Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association
ZPWMA	Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police
ZTV	Zimbabwe Television

INSTRUMENTS

Legal Instruments cited

Communal Lands Act of 1982

Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007

Provincial Councils and Administration Act Number 12 (Revised edition of 1996)

Rural District Council Act (Revised edition of 1996)

Traditional Leaders Act Chapter 29: 17, Number 25 of 1998

The Constitution of Zimbabwe (2012)

List of Figures

Figure 1: Place of my residence at Machirara High School during fieldwork.....	30
Figure 2: People, including myself, harvesting <i>barurwa</i> in the <i>jiri</i> using a <i>gokowonbo</i> (<i>barurwa</i> harvesting stick).....	51
Figure 3: <i>Harurwa</i> policemen and myself preparing <i>barurwa</i> inside the <i>musasa</i>	60
Figure 4: The <i>jiri</i> from a distance.....	69
Figure 5: Part of the <i>jiri</i> where Mukore River has its source.....	69

Figure 6: <i>Musasa</i> being constructed at the centre of the <i>jiri</i>	71
Figure 7: The local taxonomy of <i>harurwa</i> – three types of <i>harurwa</i> found in the <i>jiri</i>	76
Figure 8: A cloud of <i>harurwa</i> around the sun as they mark the beginning of their season.....	78
Figure 9: A dog that was affected by <i>harurwa fuve</i> during harvesting in the <i>jiri</i>	80
Figure 10: Live <i>harurwa</i> after harvesting in the <i>jiri</i>	81
Figure 11: Roasted <i>harurwa</i> in a plate.....	81
Figure 12: Live <i>harurwa</i> left unprepared during the <i>harurwa</i> ceremony in Norumedzo.....	84
Figure 13: Two of the four <i>harurwa</i> administrators and myself preparing <i>harurwa</i> inside the <i>musasa</i>	85
Figure 14: Varumedzo dancing during the <i>harurwa</i> ceremony.....	87
Figure 15: Trees with old cankers that were sustained during chieftainship crisis in the Norumedzo.....	143
Figure 16: Newly built homes encroaching on the mountain.....	144
Figure 17: Palms of a <i>harurwa</i> harvester that have been adversely affected by <i>harurwa fuve</i>	158
Figure 18: Lid (<i>chikapu</i>) used to sell <i>harurwa</i>	172

List of Maps

Map 1: The seven districts of Masvingo including Bikita.....	31
Map 2: The eight provinces of Zimbabwe including Masvingo where Bikita district is found.....	32
Map 3: Bikita district where Norumedzo communal area is found.....	33

List of Tables

Table 1: Leadership structures for both the bureaucratic government and traditional structures.....	41
Table 2: Detailed summary of all the FGDs held in Norumedzo Communal Area during fieldwork.....	53
Table 3: Different varieties of mushroom found in the <i>jiri</i>	73
Table 4: Tenure for Norumedzo chiefs since the time of Nemeso.....	135
Table 5: Estimated <i>harurwa</i> annual income for Mrs Mugumisi for years 2008 – 2011.....	168
Table 6: Estimated <i>harurwa</i> annual income for James for the years 2008 – 2011.....	169
Table 7: Items and exchange rates used in barter trade in the <i>jiri</i>	172

Glossary of Shona terms

Bira reharurwa/Harurwa bira.....	<i>Harurwa</i> ceremony.
Chikaranga.....	Tradition
Chipembenene (Pl. zvipembenene).....	A family of winged forest insects to which <i>harurwa</i> belong.
Chivanhu.....	A philosophy or way of life of a particular group of people with codes, norms and values such as peace, harmony and love for each other (including for other beings in the environment).
Dare.....	Traditional court of law.
Dhongi.....	Literally means a ‘donkey’, but is also used derogatorily as a word for humans whose behaviour and personal conduct are beyond societal expectations, or to distinguish a person with <i>unhu</i> and that without.
Gokovonho.....	A long stick used in <i>harurwa</i> harvesting to shake branches of tall trees.
Harurwa (Pl. Harurwa).....	<i>Encosternum delegorguei</i> Spinola/edible stinkbug.
Harurwa dzebandauko	Some amount (not specified in quantity) of <i>harurwa</i> paid as a token of appreciation by harvesters/catchers to <i>harurwa</i> administrators and policemen every time after a catch. These <i>harurwa</i> serve as food and “wages” for the <i>harurwa</i> administrators and policemen who look after the <i>jiri</i> during <i>harurwa</i> season.
Imba youshe.....	Ruling family.
Imbwa.....	Dog (also used derogatorily to refer to humans whose behaviour are beyond societal expectation).
Jengetaivhu (Pl. vanajengetaivhu).....	Environment Conservation Monitor.
Jiri.....	Grove/sacred forest.
Kudzika bango.....	To construct <i>musasa</i> .

Kufukura hapwa.....Tampering with sacred places.

Kugumha.....To shake trees with stones during harvesting to make *harurwa* fall on the ground.

Kuparadza musasa.....Burning down the *musasa* to mark the end of the *harurwa* season.

Kumema munda.....Appreciating the field.

Mapa.....Caves where ancestral chiefs were buried.

MaputiRoasted mealie cobs.

Mhondoro.....Ancestral lions who in Shona culture are understood as senior ancestors.

Mhepo.....A Shona word for spirit (normally a bad one). It could also be used to refer to wind.

Mudzimu (Pl. vadzimu).....A Shona word for ancestor.

Munhu (Pl. vanhu).....A Shona word for human being, but normally that with *unhu*.

Muntu.....A Bantu-African word for person.

Musasa.....Camp where *harurwa* policemen and *harurwa* administrators live during *harurwa* season. It is constructed yearly at the centre of the *jiri*.

Mutoro.....A big tree at the centre of the *jiri* where the last harvest of *harurwa* in a season (normally in end of August or early-mid September) is done.

Mutupo.....Totem/a particular animal species that a group of people of the same origin are not allowed to eat. It is identity mark of a particular ethnic group.

Mwari.....God. Also known as the Creator or Supreme Being.

Mweya.....A Shona word for soul/spirit of a human being. It could also be used to refer to wind.

Ngozi.....Avenging spirit.

Njere.....A Shona word for intelligence.

Njuzu.....A Shona word for mermaid/half fish and half human being.

Pikiti.....*Harurwa* guarding in the *jiri* whereby *harurwa* policemen will be patrolling the *jiri* to check if there are no people who are harvesting *harurwa* illegally or against the set practices.

Svikiro (Pl. masvikiro).....Spirit mediums.

Tsika dzechiDuma.....Customs and values of the Duma people.

Tsime raNemeso.....Nemeso's well/spring.

Tswanda.....Small baskets used during *harurwa* harvesting (and also for other domestic purposes).

Unhu.....The ethics of *chivanhu*.

Vakweguru.....Literally 'old people' or 'village elders', but used as a word of respect for women and men past a certain age who are custodians of culture and tradition.

Varumedzo.....Norumedzo people.

INTRODUCTION: Setting the Research Agenda

For us who were born and grew up here, harurwa is our life. Our forefathers, parents and ourselves today have always depended on harurwa. With harurwa we manage to send our children to school, to buy our groceries and even big things like goats and herds of cattle. In fact, harurwa is our gold here and I wonder how we will live if harurwa go extinct. I, therefore, wish to urge traditional leadership here to keep on enforcing traditional restrictions and beliefs about harurwa and the jiri (Mrs Mugumisi, May 2012).

This dissertation seeks to illustrate the complex interconnections between humans, forests, ancestors, and other beings¹ (such as *harurwa*) that participate, though in different ways, in the conservation of forests in Norumedzo Communal Area of south-eastern Zimbabwe. The study was motivated by my observation that the Zimbabwean state, through its Environmental Management Agency, emphasises mono-conservation methodology (adopted from Western modernist science) instead of promoting multiple conservation methodologies (including indigenous conservation methods) in its conservation projects. Besides, the study was motivated by my observation that work on conservation has mainly been dominated with literature on externally initiated and controlled Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) which I think is too narrow to capture the complexity of relationships between people and other beings. During fieldwork, I could see there were a great many connections between what was happening in forestry conservation in the Norumedzo and what I had read around post-humanities literature on relationships between humans and other species. Put differently, my field observations together with the literature on post-humanism influenced me to choose to critically explore possibilities for the mutual co-existence of human beings, biological organisms (a unique species of insects known as *harurwa*²), and other beings in this given environment,

¹ I prefer using the term “other beings” to Bruno Latour (1987; 1993; 2005) and others’ [i.e Michel Callon 1986] “nonhuman” because there are some “creatures”/entities that are difficult to classify either as humans or nonhumans as they are part human and part nonhuman. Vampire and the werewolf (see Jake Kosek 2010: 672), for example, are part human, part nonhuman becomings that result from the contagion of the battlefields. So are entities in the Norumedzo area such as *vadzimu* (ancestors), *mbondoro* (lion spirits), and *njuzu* (mermaids/half fish half human creatures) that according to my interlocutors in the Norumedzo are not purely humans. Neither are they purely nonhumans, but are simply referred to as *zvisikwa zvaMwari* (other beings created by God). As such, throughout this thesis, I use the terms humans and other beings, the latter to refer all those entities that cannot be classified as humans both in part or in totality.

² *Harurwa* [singular/plural] are edible forest insects known as edible stinkbugs (*Encosternum delegorguei* spinola).

Norumedzo Communal Area in Ward 15 of Bikita District, Masvingo Province in the south-eastern region of rural Zimbabwe.

To unravel the complex nuances and subtleties between humans, insects, forests and the state, this study examines economic flows, the social interactions, networks and relationships between humans and *harurwa*, particularly on how human relationships with the latter –*harurwa* – help conserve the ecosystem in south-eastern Zimbabwe. Unpacking the networks between humans, forests and the insects, *harurwa* would be useful in rethinking the modernistic divisions made between humans and other beings, knowledge and belief, the natural and the social as well as strategies for sustainable environmental management. This study, thus, brings critical epistemological reflections as it questions the familiar. In anthropological theory, questioning the familiar is important as it allows us to understand the deep structural tensions and contradictions in knowledge and open up new epistemic positions. On this note, this study quests to expose to the twilight zone the different ways in which forest insects could benefit environmental conservation in Zimbabwe. The study also examines how multiple conservation knowledges including locally generated knowledge could be legitimised and harnessed for environmental good. Besides, the study deploys in practice “symmetrical anthropology” (Latour 1993, 2007) – an anthropology that practically moves beyond the nature/culture divide and is open-ended. This is achieved by advancing a ‘new’ engagement zones perspective to conservation knowledge – an approach that moves beyond the Western modernist division of the world into nature and culture while promoting social relations between humans and other beings. More importantly, the study seeks to bring to light the environmental practices of the local indigenous people in relation to their natural environments, thereby closing theoretical and research gaps around issues of conservation. The study has been largely shaped by my initial observations and experiences during fieldwork in the Norumedzo Communal Area. A good example of such experiences and observations is the one I had during my initial days of research in the Norumedzo, which I elaborate in the paragraph below.

Before entering the Norumedzo *Jiri* I could not believe that in south-eastern Zimbabwe there are vast forests that are still being conserved through traditional restrictions, sacred controls and collective community participation (see also Mukamuri 1995b). Contrary to what is generally recorded in literature on community resource management, where collective community participation is generally initiated by external agents or the state (Murphree 1991; Katerere 1999; Marongwe 2004), participation in the Norumedzo is initiated by the local people themselves. Besides, it is conservation between and by the locals and other beings such as

harurwa, *mbondoro* (lion ancestors/senior ancestors), and *vadzimu* (ancestors). I was perplexed by what I saw in the *jiri*. It was indeed a different world altogether, a protected forest of approximately 7 km². As I will describe here, the Norumedzo *Jiri* is a ‘sacred’ forest that is revered by the Norumedzo people (Varumedzo) of south-eastern Zimbabwe. The *jiri* is famed for *harurwa* (edible stinkbugs) which are a delicacy in the area and beyond, and whose origin is explained in a myth about the forefathers of the Norumedzo people (also known as *VaDuma*/the Duma people) of the *Moyo* (heart) totem (see also Maredza 1985).

On May 10, 2012, the time which I was carrying out fieldwork for this study in the Norumedzo, I visited one old villager, Sekuru Vakai (not his real name). Sekuru Vakai was in his early 80s, but was still strong and energetic. As one of the senior members of the Norumedzo Communal Area (NCA), I wanted to ask him about the origins of the Norumedzo Forest (commonly known as the Norumedzo *Jiri*) and what motivated forestry conservation in the area. At around 10 in the morning, I arrived at Sekuru Vakai’s homestead. The old man was there! He was seated behind his grass thatched bedroom in the sun as winter had already started. After going through greeting formalities, we discussed some general issues about the Norumedzo and *harurwa*. I could see from our conversation that Sekuru Vakai had a wealth of knowledge blended with charm and wit. He had many stories about *harurwa* (edible stinkbugs), the *jiri*³ and people in the Norumedzo – stories he could narrate so vividly and in a manner that satiates the thirst of any listener. When I asked him about what had motivated forest conservation in the *jiri*, Sekuru Vakai explained:

It is because of harurwa that today we have the flourishing Norumedzo Jiri. If there were no harurwa around here, I am sure there could have been serious deforestation going on as we find in other places where there are no harurwa or such other beings that participate in forest conservation in the way harurwa do. You know harurwa are a source of livelihood in this area, and they live in trees. That is why our ancestors set aside the jiri for the harurwa to flourish. You see harurwa are good partners in conservation – if there were no harurwa there could have been no jiri in this area.

Motivated by my conversation with Sekuru Vakai, I became primarily interested in examining the complex relationships between people and other beings and also how these relationships influence conservation practices in the Norumedzo Communal Area.

³ *Jiri* is a sacred forest that is normally reserved and revered for its richness in non-timber products or some other spiritually powerful beings believed to inhabit the forest. The Norumedzo *jiri*, for instance, is a sacred forest reserved by the Norumedzo people (Varumedzo) of South-eastern Zimbabwe for a unique species of insects known as *harurwa* and also for the spiritual beliefs associated with the forest.

With this thrust, my study forms part of a shift in Anthropology to rethink the ways in which the binary of nature and culture has served to confine anthropological attention to the social or the study of humans alone. Arguing that such a divide is artificial and that it impedes understanding of environmentalities, I make reference to the emerging body of literature in the post-humanities (also known as post-humanism) (Haraway 1991, 2003, 2007; Lien and Law 2010; Bostrom 2003; Simon 2003; Nayar 2009; Wolfe 2010; Raffles 2010) that seeks to focus attention on the relationships between people, animals, the state, and things.

Post-humanities/post-humanism is one of the most contentious and often misconstrued concepts such that discourses surrounding it are not homogeneous as they present a series of often contradictory ideas – and the term post-humanities itself is highly contested with one of the foremost scholars associated with it, Manuel de Landa (1991) decrying it as “very silly”. Similarly, Wolfe (2010: xi) writes, “post-humanism generates different and even irreconcilable definitions”. Post-humanism, thus, has been understood, for example, as a critique of the humanities – an anthropocentric, imperial discipline that not only privileged the human over other forms of life, and also some kinds of humanity such as the white male and heterosexual (Nayar 2009: 1); it is a perspective that follows possible life paths and relations which would sooner or later require growing into posthuman persons or automated organisms (Bostrom 2003). More specifically, and as is understood in this study, post-humanities is a perspective that “investigates the many ways that the human has been entangled in complex relationships with animals, the environment, and technology for which theoretical and ethical understandings of humanism are no longer adequate” (Nayar 2009: 6). In view of this understanding, Bostrom (2003: 5) warns that post-humanism “does not denote just anything that happens to come after the human era, nor does it have anything to do with the ‘posthumous’. In particular, post-humanism does *not* imply that there are no humans anymore” (also see Wolfe 2010: xiv). The posthuman, like the cyborg which is a hybrid of machine and organism, questions, for instance, the salient line between humans and robots (Haraway 1991: 150) as its identity is linked to both humans and machines (Hayles 1999). This is because post-humanities begin by meshing the human-individual with the nonhuman-collective (Nayar 2009). The major advantage of post-humanism especially as can be applied to conservation as that in Norumedzo is threefold: that it enables dialogue between different conservational knowledge forms – what I shall call ‘multiple conservation knowledges’; it encourages ‘good’ relations between humans and other actors (Nayar 2009; Haraway 2003, 2007; Raffles 2010) or other beings in the world they share and; it resists the Western enlightenment modernist (hereafter referred to as Western modernist) divide between nature and culture. This means that as far as conservation in Norumedzo is concerned,

there is much to be celebrated in post-humanism. I am, however, mindful of the fact that post-humanism is a highly contested perspective and with major criticisms that if unregulated (e.g. in the case of technology used to modify human nature) it (post-humanism) may threaten and erode the essence of humanity (Simon 2003) and do away with human institutions (such as legal institutions) leading to chaos (Bostron 2003). Post-humanism might in itself be degrading so that by becoming posthuman and equating ourselves with other beings such as animals we might be harming ourselves or undermining our dignity as human beings (Bostrom 2005).

In view of these criticisms that could be levelled against post-humanism, I want to point out to my readers that I do not take post-humanism as given, but test its key aspects and variants as enunciated by Haraway and Wolfe. I aim to demonstrate that post-humanism as a critique of modernist ontologies opens a way to rethink the critical humanities. It does not purport to describe the world as it is for all, but open up different ways of thinking about the world, in this case my field situation, the Norumedzo. In this light, where the variants of post-humanism are dissonant with my ethnographic material, I apply those theories or ideas that help analysing the data without deforming it. Also, where possible I suggest how post-humanism can be enhanced by what I have gathered⁴ in the field, ideas from some African scholars, and theories (such as *ubuntu* and critical border thinking) so as to render it more apt in conservation in contexts such as Norumedzo. For example, in explaining the relationships between humans and other beings existent in Norumedzo such as *zvisikwa* ('things' or other beings created by God), *vanhu* (humans), *vadzimu* (ancestors/living-dead), *Mwari* (God/Creator), one could find it difficult or rather impossible to apply some aspects of post-humanism as enunciated by its prominent advocates such as Donna Haraway and Cary Wolfe. In *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003: 14, emphasis mine), for instance, Haraway details that, "generally speaking, one does not eat one's companion species (nor get eaten by them)" as humans should see themselves as equal beings to their companions such as sheepdogs simply because "the dog's judgment may sometimes be better than the human's on the job" (p. 39). Of course, I should emphasise that Haraway's argument here, however, refers to relationships between humans and pets that live with humans which are indeed different from *harurwa*, it could be interpreted to mean advocating for equality between humans and other beings such as *harurwa*.

Similar to Haraway's argument above is Cary Wolfe's. In espousing his post-humanism, Wolfe (2003, 2010) rejects speciesism which he considers as the systematic discrimination against

⁴ Note that where a particular chapter has called for more detailed ethnographic data or theoretical analysis than I provide here, I do so in the relevant chapter itself as is done in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

another based solely on a generic characteristic – in this case, species. While Wolfe’s rejection of specicism could be interpreted by others as a failure to recognise that species can be defined by their reproductive potential which in fact does not rule out co-existence among different species, he in fact advocates co-existence between human and the nonhuman other. Wolfe, in his *What is Posthumanism?* (2010) makes the idea of ‘postanthropocentrism’ a key focus of post-humanist thinking, that is, a rethinking of the human with its nonhuman others (which for him include animals, machines, objects and systems). He thus says: “the distinction between human and animal should be of no use in drawing them” (p. 98) given that animals also suffer the same way as humans do. Wolfe like Haraway, thus, is against the divide between humans and ‘nonhumans’ such as animals. The duo support Peter Singer’s (1975) argument that the principle of equal consideration of interests cannot be limited to humans or nonhuman animals because both suffer pain. This means that Haraway and Wolfe’s post-humanism, like Latour’s (2005) Actor Network Theory (ANT) which though it can be applauded for refusing the imposed Western constructs of binaries such as nature/culture, advocate flat ontologies or equal biovalue of species – human equality with all other beings.

It is my contention that in the Norumedzo, such a position as explained above is problematic. In fact, my engagement with the Varumedzo (Norumedzo people, as they call themselves) over twelve and half months of my fieldwork (between December 2011 and December 2012) revealed that there is a hierarchy in the order of ‘things’ – *zvisikwa*, *vanhu*, *vadzimu* and *Mwari*. In the Varumedzo worldview, though *zvisikwa* can be understood as companions of humans in the sense that they live in the community with the people (even in trees at home and the *jiri*), the former are not considered equals to humans, and also can be eaten by humans; otherwise it would have been impossible for humans to eat *zvisikwa* such as *harurwa*. If we keep in mind the value of prolonged observations, we can appreciate the significance of Placide Tempels’ observations, though they are arguably considered not as ethnographic but ethnological, who lived with (researched and wrote about) the indigenous Africans of West Africa for an extended period of time. Writing of the indigenous people of Congo, Tempels (1959: 61), a Belgian missionary in the Belgian Congo, notes that “in Africa a hierarchical ordering of forces exists. Forces are situated within the hierarchy according to the strength of their vitality/*vital force*”. My observations (in Norumedzo) and Tempels’ (in West Africa), thus, means that Haraway and Wolfe’s use of the term ‘post-humanism’ could not be universally applied to all societies such as those in Africa as a close study of the Varumedzo about their attitude to and relations with other beings will show that it is a misnomer. Put differently, although post-humanism is an attempt to develop a new philosophy of being in the

world, it is not universally held and indeed even while Norumedzo thought on *harurwa* differs from modernist assumptions, it is also not the same as (or reducible to) the views of post-humanism. This is because Varumedzo do not believe that they are equal beings to *zvisekwa*, *vadzimu*, *mbondoro* (lion spirits), or *Mwari*. Rather they [Varumedzo] believe that they are closely related (in terms of their socialisation) with the aforementioned beings [*zvisekwa*, *vadzimu*, *mbondoro*, *Mwari*], but not as equal beings though each of these beings' dignity and worth is highly considered in the enmeshed web of relationships. Similar observations have also been made elsewhere in Africa (see Tempels 1959; Opoku 1978; Mbiti 1969, 1975; Bourdillon 1987; Chivaura 2006). Bourdillon (1987), for example, pointed out that *mbondoro* spirit is a revered Shona territorial spirit that is believed to have dominion over a very big area and whose anger can result in misfortune or even death of the perpetrator. The point is, the Varumedzo relate with other beings in a manner that neither undermine their own dignity as human beings (as some aspects of post-humanism would advocate) nor that of the other beings. I argue, therefore, that in Norumedzo equating humans with *zvisekwa* such as animals or *harurwa* is opprobrious or rather degrading. Yet this is not to say that other beings such as *zvisekwa* are disregarded as morality or ethics – the study of what is good or bad – in the Norumedzo is also extended to relationships with other beings through the ethics of *hunhu/ubuntu* such that torturing or ill-treating (and so on) the latter is never permissible within Varumedzo.

Worth noting in Haraway and Wolfe's post-humanism is also their querying or troubling of the ready acceptance of the world as divided into modernistic categories such as humans and nonhumans. I found this querying fascinating and quite germane to what is happening in Norumedzo. In Norumedzo, the modernistic classification of 'things' into humans and nonhumans is rendered problematic given that there are some beings like *vadzimu*, *njuzu* (mermaids/half human half fish creatures), *mbondoro*, and *Mwari*, among others, that the Varumedzo consider neither as humans nor nonhumans. Also, in Norumedzo, these beings (*njuzu*, *mbondoro*, *vadzimu*, *Mwari* etc.) are not considered as terrestrial beings per se, but as beings in the "world beyond" (Mawere 2010; Mawere 2011b), which can mingle, comingle, associate and disassociate with humans and other terrestrial beings (see also Teffo and Roux 2002). These beings, thus, escape the purview of the modernistic classification of things as humans and nonhumans. For this reason, in Norumedzo the referred beings are called by their names (i.e. *njuzu*, *mbondoro* etc.) and are not classified as humans or nonhumans; classifying the aforementioned beings either as humans or nonhumans has profound implications to these beings in that it blurs their specificities or their different ways of being in the world.

Based on my fieldwork observations of the interconnections and relationships between humans, *zvisikwa* (such as *harurwa*), and other beings that have moved past the world of humans (such as *vadzimu*), I reiterate that *zvisikwa*, *vanhu*, *vadzimu*, and *Mwari* are socially connected to each other. Besides, all *zvisikwa* are ‘well’ considered by *vanhu* but not as equal beings. Otherwise, it could have been impossible for people to eat animal meat or *harurwa* as this would be interpreted as cannibalism. According to the Varumedzo cosmology, this connection and hierarchical order allows *vanhu* to relate to some of the *zvisikwa* both as resources and companions/partners in the world they share, and not as equal beings. More so, these orders, connections, and relations between *vanhu* and other beings are maintained or regulated by ‘local’ institutions and belief systems such as taboos to ensure sustainability (see also Sheridan and Nyamweru 2008).

Given that some key aspects of post-humanism as elaborated above could be rendered inapplicable in some circles of environmental conservation such as that of the Norumedzo, I seek an explanation that can cover up for the inapplicable aspects [in contexts such as Norumedzo] in Ingold (2011) and Fairhead and Leach’s (2005) conceptions of meshworks and social networks respectively; concepts which also explore some aspects of post-humanism that include connections and lines of life. By meshworks, Ingold means entangled lines of life, growth and movement (p. 63). On the other hand, Fairhead and Leach understand social networks as the web of relationships among people that spans familial bonds and voluntary associations. While I find Ingold and Fairhead and Leach’s conceptualisations of meshworks and social networks an important move in attempting to explain connections between humans and other beings, I find the conceptualisation limiting in that it confines relationships only to the living and humans. The conceptualisation fails to capture and explain interconnections and relationships between humans and other beings that can hardly be considered as fully humans or living. In Norumedzo, for example, there are some relations between *vanhu* and other beings that can hardly be considered as fully humans such as *njuzu*, *vadzimu* and *Mwari*. In fact, while there is no doubt that in Norumedzo, humans are interconnected and relate with other beings in many different ways, for the Varumedzo it is an oversimplification to equate humans with all other beings. Thus my experience during fieldwork suggests that oversimplifying the relationships between humans and other beings occludes the networks and somehow ‘permeable’ interconnectedness that exist between the Varumedzo and other beings. For scholars such as Nyamnjoh, oversimplifying relations between humans and other beings is tantamount to “resist opening up one’s mind to life-worlds unfolding themselves through the interplay between

everyday practice and the manifold actions and messages of humans, ancestors and non-human agents in sites of emerging meaning-production” (2012: 63).

To overcome the limitations of Ingold and Fairhead and Leach’s respective network perspectives of meshworks and social networks as well as the highlighted possible downsides of a post-humanities perspective in general (as they apply to conservation in Norumedzo), I propose in my analysis of the connections and relationships between humans and other beings, a network perspective I will tentatively call “engagement zones theory”. Also, I will draw upon other African theorists (Ramose 1999; Marongwe 2004; Chivaura 2006, among others) and African-based theories such as *ubuntu/hunhu* in buttressing my proposed perspective which I think, if my fieldwork is anything to go by, can enhance post-humanism by lending it those aspects which it may have not taken aboard. *Ubuntu* is a multifaceted philosophical system – a philosophy of humanness concerned with the reinforcement of unity, social cohesion, oneness, solidarity and peace for the good life of everyone and everything (Ramose 1999; Chivaura 2006), living or otherwise. *Ubuntu*, thus, is a philosophy of humanness based on the recognition of the continuous oneness and wholeness of the living, the living-dead, and the unborn.

To elaborate on my proposed perspective – engagement zones theory – I underscore that by engagement zones I mean points or zones where different beings or actors interact, associate, disassociate, connect, disconnect, meet and part freely or otherwise. They are like “political grounds” or playing grounds where opponents play to win each other, and associates (say from the same team) meet to sharpen their skills or to work for the common goal, whatever it might be (for example sustainable conservation). In such zones, therefore, antagonisms or co-operations, merging, integrations or disconnections, and symmetries or asymmetries are normally experienced. This means that in such playing grounds, as in any game where rules are important, referees are also present to regulate the game. I should underline that the referees, in the case of Norumedzo, could be institutions – formal or informal and philosophies such as *unhu/ubuntu* – that regulate different actors’ behaviour and actions. In this sense, engagement zones may be either productive and helpful or counter-productive and destructive depending on how participants relate with each other. This perspective is motivated by my observations in Norumedzo where, as explained above, relationships and interconnectedness are not only limited to the so-called “living” and humans, but extend to other beings conceived as living, nonliving or otherwise. These beings include *njuzu*, *mbondoro*, *vadzimu*, *Mwari*, and others.

In proposing the engagement zones perspective (which I expand further in chapter 3), I seek to advance the post-humanities initiative of going beyond Western modernist divisions of

the world into culture and nature (but without altering the different actors' essences – humans and other beings – and social relationships in any way). Culture and nature are categories which I think are a Western modernist construct given that both humans and other beings can possibly meet in engagement zones in a productive (or counter-productive way depending on how they relate) especially in issues of conservation. In my view, divisions of the world into nature and culture, subject and object, without a proper understanding of how different beings relate and interact limits our understanding of the world. As Mbembe (1997) argues, understanding the visible is hardly complete without investigating other [possible] beings in the world such as the invisible and even the nonbeing. We misunderstand the world if “we consider the obverse and the reverse of the world as two opposite sides, with the former partaking of a ‘being there’ (real presence) and the latter as ‘being elsewhere’ or a ‘non-being’ (irremediable absence) or, worse, of the order of unreality” (Mbembe, 1997: 152). The world is more than the modernistic binaries have made it out to be.

In view of Mbembe's assertion above, the engagement zones perspective I propose in this study privileges fluidity, interdependence, negotiability, creativity, conviviality and co-existence without making the “co-existents” mere copies of each other, but as variables which unite [or disconnect] and at the same time distinguish themselves from many others central to popular ontologies in Africa (see also Nyamnjoh 2012). Engagement zones thus also privileges endogeny. As given by Hountondji (1997: 18), endogeny (or endogenous) is not necessarily static, it can be dynamic given that there can be no absolute interiority nor an absolutely first origin. This understanding is germane to what happens in the Norumedzo *Jiri* where participants of all kinds come in and out, convive, mingle, and relate; hence my perspective tentatively known as engagement zones theory. As highlighted above, the perspective goes beyond Ingold's meshworks as well as Fairhead and Leach's social networks, which are limited only to humans and life without acknowledging possibilities for death. It also counters the widespread Western enlightenment modernistic divisions of the world by seeking productive conviviality, crossing, mingling and creative negotiation of different actors and knowledge forms. This means that engagement zones perspective recognises that social actors have some freedom to act though they are also constrained by social structures in one way or another.

Motivated by the data I collected in the Norumedzo around networks and connections (between variables such as *harurwa*, *vanbu*, *vadzimu*, *mbondoro*, *Mwari*, state and the forest) and by my proposed perspective of engagement zones, I should reiterate that I will only apply some key aspects of post-humanism where I think they help in replaying or undoing modernistic

“artificial” divides, such as that of nature and culture. Besides, the key aspects of post-humanism as enunciated by Haraway and Wolfe will be applied where I see the aspects enabling fresh conversations between different or multiple conservation knowledges – conversations that do not promote epistemological imperialism or restrictive ways of knowing and frivolous dismissal of other ways of knowing. In my view, such conversations will allow a “paradigm shift” in conservation and resource management that are informed by each one’s experiences and perspectives (also see Ki-Zerbo, 1992), while simultaneously striving to move away from the state-centered costly management approach to ‘local actors’ participatory management that is less costly and directly benefits the communities who own and manage the resources in the areas they live.

It is of utmost importance to underscore that undoing the modernistic divides, especially in the area of conservation, is critical in avoiding what Chimamanda Adichie (2009) calls “the danger of a single story”. That is, a narrow view of the world (in this case of conservation) based on unsubstantiated prejudices. As Adichie (2009: 5) warns us “a single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story” by rejecting all other possible ways of telling the same story. It is on this level, I argue, that avoiding the danger of a single story would entail advocacy of multiple conservation knowledges as opposed to the current ‘mono conservation knowledge’ that privileges modernist epistemologies being used by the Zimbabwean government (since the colonial era) in its national conservation projects.

Relying on the idea of a ‘single story’ of conservation where science is considered the sole provider of conservation knowledge, the Zimbabwean government has in many parts of the country initiated externally driven community-based natural resources management (CBNRM) under its Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) related activities, as opposed to organic community-based natural resource management (OCBNRM) (Katerere 1999; Marongwe 2004) which is conservation that considers local communities’ traditional practices as were deployed in the past, particularly the pre-colonial era (and are still practised elsewhere) by some local communities. That said, and using a case study of Norumedzo *Jiri* (Norumedzo Grove) in Bikita district in south-eastern Zimbabwe (see maps 1, 2 and 3), this study has ethnographically examined the status and role of formal and informal local level institutions. This is done within the framework of what some scholars (Bonger 1999; Murombedzi 1994; Madzudzo 2002) have described as community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) as used in the Southern African context with reference to outside led

interventions to foster, influence and inform sustainable conservation in rural areas. Thus, the approach of CBNRM is central to post-colonial governance; hence it is also examined in relation to conservation in the Norumedzo Communal Area of Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe.

The status and role of CBNRM within the framework of conservation in rural communities (such as Norumedzo) as driven by the 'local' people themselves is examined in view of the fact that the theme of sustainable natural resource use through local community participation has been on the international agenda since the first global environmental conference in Stockholm, Sweden in 1972. In this conference, a gloomy picture of resource degradation – especially in the so-called developing countries – such as increasing desertification, soil erosion, and declining biodiversity in terrestrial and aquatic resources were attributed to the exclusion of local communities in resource management and state-centred approach to common pool resource management (Madzudzo 2002). The deliberations of this conference came as a formidable challenge to those conservationists who believed that sustainable conservation could only be achieved through formal science and not initiatives from the “local” or rural communities. The term sustainability (of natural resources) re-emerged in the late 1980s as key to environmental studies and was referred to by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations.

Since this work also focuses on the contribution of forest insects, in particular *harurwa*, in forest protection, emphasis is placed on exploring relationships between various actors in conservation in rural areas. An exploration of these relationships and anthropological examination of the mutual interdependence of rural Zimbabweans, edible forest insects (particularly *harurwa*), and the natural forests are critical to understanding the ecosystemic knowledges upon which the livelihoods of many rural Zimbabweans are hinged. To this end, the present study attempts to show, using data collected during fieldwork in the Norumedzo, how in Zimbabwe, a group of edible insects is as much a socio-political entity as it is a participant in forest protection. This study, thus, begins to imagine an analytic framing of conservation in which these insects, *harurwa*, might be recognised as forest conservation participants in a post-colonial Zimbabwean state. I should underscore, however, that while the study engages with network theories (posthumanism and later in Chapter 3, relational ontology) which in fact have the same foundational basis, the objective is not to legitimise but to enhance them in such a way that they become relevant to contexts such as Norumedzo. As has already been highlighted (and expanded in chapter 3), the study critiques the aforementioned theories before proposing an

alternative network perspective (I have tentatively called engagement zones perspective). This perspective, as has already been argued (and expanded in chapter 3) has the merit that it privileges conviviality, fluidity, co-existence and interdependence between humans and other beings, which makes it more relevant and applicable in contexts such as Norumedzo.

Background to environment conservation and insects debates in Zimbabwe

The contribution of some insects such as *harurwa* and bees, *ishwa/Macrotermes spp.*, mopane worms/*amacimbi/madora*, among others to human lives and the natural environment cannot be underestimated (see Kosek 2010). Talking of honeybees, for example, aside from honey and beeswax, over one-third of current global agriculture production depends on the honeybee for pollination (Cox-Foster and van Engelsdorp 2009; Kosek 2010). Yet, the contribution of insects' relations with *vanhu*, trees and many other beings in the world as well as the importance of social networks, informal institutions, and social interactions in forest conservation has been under-researched. This has been the case with *harurwa* in the unique Norumedzo grove commonly known as Norumedzo *Jiri* in south-eastern Zimbabwe. Notwithstanding the preponderance of sustaining a richly diverse biodiversity and balanced natural ecosystem, much of the mainstream literature on the insects known as *harurwa* has foregrounded their economic, nutritional and medicinal value. To this end, the focus of that literature in Zimbabwe and the southern African region has paid special attention to *harurwa's* history (Maredza 1985; Nyathi 2005), scientific description (Faure 1944; Imms *et al* 1977; Makuku 1993a, 1993b; Picker *et al* 2004), medicinal properties (Teffo 2006; Chidavaenzi 2010), nutritional value (Ramos-Elorduy 1997; Teffo 2006; Teffo *et al* 2007; Dzerefos *et al* 2009), and economic significance (Maredza 1985; Makuku 1993a, 1993b; Teffo 2006; Teffo *et al* 2007; Dzerefos and Rider 2010; Chidavaenzi 2010). While these studies are important in furnishing us with data on insects, they are incomplete in so far as they neglect the role of insects in forest conservation, hence their limitation. The contribution of some insects such as *harurwa* as participants in forest conservation has not been seriously considered: the contribution of *harurwa* in forest conservation has been under-researched and/or undermined.

In Zimbabwe, this under-researching of *harurwa* has contributed to a limited grasp of ways of thinking about the forest, conservation knowledges, other beings and of what exactly has triggered the environmental conservation problems in the country. Thus while many scholars (Katerere, Hill and Moyo 2001; Mukamuri 1995a; Mawere 2012) agree that Zimbabwe is

currently facing immense problems of environmental degradation the real cause underlying environmental problems has remained debatable. This has been aggravated by the fact that Zimbabwe is experiencing a number of environmental conservation problems, in addition to the economic and political problems the country is experiencing since the turn of the millennium. With the formation of the opposition, Movement for Democratic Change party in 1999, there have been serious incidences of political violence and human rights abuses, perpetrated mostly by the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) (see also Raftopoulos 2009; Coltart 2008). The violence and abuses led to the country to suffer targeted sanctions in the form of traveling bans and isolation from the international community, especially the Western block resulting in socio-economic and political turmoil in Zimbabwe. In the face of the socio-economic and political turmoil Zimbabwe is experiencing, the country's environmental conservation has not been spared. It has also been negatively affected and made to struggle to ensure sustainable exploitation of resources and environmental sustainability.

The field of sustainability, though it is debatable across disciplines, falls under the broad category of sustainable development which in itself can be conceptually broken into three constituent but overlapping parts: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and social-political sustainability (NISER 2009). This means sustainable development does not focus solely on environmental issues or solely on one of the aforementioned parts. More broadly, sustainable development policies encompass three general policy areas: economic, environmental and social (NISER 2009). In support of this, several United Nations texts, especially the 2005 World Summit Outcome document, refer to the “interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars” of sustainable development as economic, social development and environmental protection. I argue that considering conservation in some rural communities such as the Norumedzo, these pillars need not only be balanced but re-thought in terms of relationships and not as categories in the modernistic sense.

My argument above is proffered in view of the realisation that balancing conservation of resources with the needs for development has always been problematic in the southern African region and particularly in Zimbabwe, especially after the national independence in 1980 due to a number of factors. As such, there have been serious contestations in environmental conservation in Zimbabwe, before and even after national independence, on the root causes of the environmental problems in the country with some scholars arguing that overpopulation and practices of the local people triggered environmental degradation (Aylen 1941; Bowyer-Bower 1996). Aylen (1941), for example, claims that during pre-colonial times and in the earlier part of

the colonial period, there was little detrimental impact on the environment by human land use in Zimbabwe. This is attributed to the extensive and fallow land-use practices that provided well for the relatively low population densities, as well as the practice of indigenous soil conservation. For Bowyer-Bower (1996), the Western awareness since the 20th century, through science, of the causes and effects of land degradation from inappropriate land use and management, and the need for and use of appropriate monitoring techniques and conservation measures kept environmental degradation levels in Zimbabwe fairly low. For him, it is in fact during the 20th century that land-use guidelines for environmental protection were legislated such that a formal management infrastructure for their research, implementation, and support through extension services remained considerable.

Other scholars (Moyo *et al* 1991; Ribot 1999; Mandondo 2000; Phimister 1974; Mackenzie 1970; Ilife 1990; Masaka 2011; Mukamuri 1995a; Hanlon *et al* 2013) blame Western science and colonialism for the country's conservation problems. In this vein, Moyo *et al* (1991), for instance, argue that during pre-colonial times and the earlier part of the colonial period, land was neither a scarce resource, nor was it under threat of environmental degradation. Instead, they argue, increasing colonial settlement and control led to inequality of access to the natural resources. Moyo *et al*, thus, are against Aylen's (1941) view that during pre-colonial times and the earlier part of the colonial period, there was little detrimental impact on the environment by human land use in Zimbabwe because of the extensive, nomadic and fallow land-use practices that provided well for the relatively low population densities. To support their argument, Moyo *et al* refer to the Land Apportionment Act of the 1930s that took away most of the fertile communal land from the majority and converted it into commercial farms for the minorities in the government of the time. Hanlon *et al* (2013: 2, emphasis mine) also make reference to the negative impact of Land Apportionment Act of the 1930s in Zimbabwe to both the environment and people when they note that "as more *indigenous Africans* were pushed into the poor half of the land designated for Africans, overcrowding became so bad that it led to land degradation." This means that with an annual population growth rate in excess of 3.5 per cent (IUCN 1988) and shrinking access to land, conservation methods by the 'local' people including fallow and extensive grazing became impractical in these communal areas, hence land degradation set in.

Masaka similarly argues that the twin sisters of colonialism and Western science are to blame for the conservation problems in Zimbabwe. For Masaka (2011:331) "the colonisation of Zimbabwe and the rest of the African continent was predicated on a treacherous basis of trying to improve the lives of people of Africa when in fact it spelt doom to the Africans and the

resource dispossession that impoverished people that had managed to survive within their means prior to the advent of colonialism”. He maintains, further, on the basis of stereotypical images created by the colonialists such as the labeling of Africa as a dark continent, among others, that colonialism in Zimbabwe was predicated on the myth that the locals were not rational enough to be able to sustainably use the natural resources at their disposal. Thus for Masaka (ibid), the creation of such stereotypical images culminated in the subsequent centuries, above all in the 18th and 19th centuries, with the categorising and labeling that eventually led to what Mudimbe calls ‘the invention of Africa’ (1988), that is, the systematic and systemic manufacturing of a continent on the basis of the Aristotelian paradigms of superiority versus inferiority, civilised versus uncivilised, among other epithets.

This discussion sheds light on aspects of the debates between (formal) scientific conservationists and traditional conservationists. Yet in considering the trajectory of land contestations in Zimbabwe since the colonial period, one can safely argue that such perspectives do more harm than good with regard to the management and conservation of the natural environment and, consequently, the development of Zimbabwe’s agricultural sector – which was the backbone of the country’s economy. Zimbabwe has experienced a cataclysmic meltdown of its economy and environmental conservation practices, especially since the turn of the millennium. During this period, the country has engaged in a politicisation of land that has resulted in widespread farm invasions and highly contentious economic and political decisions, especially in the years prior to the government of national unity (GNU) of 2008 onwards. It is my contention that decisions made by the government both before and after Zimbabwe’s independence in 1980 have had a negative impact on the national environmental conservation project in a number of different ways. In fact, both the colonial and post-independence governments failed the environmental conservation project of Zimbabwe, albeit in different ways.

For some scholars (Aylen 1941; Bowyer-Bower 1996), the colonial government in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) is central for suggesting the need for legislating and using monitoring techniques and conservation measures and for establishing a formal natural resource management infrastructure in the country. Nevertheless, this regime still had many drawbacks for local communities and their way of life. For purposes of this study, I emphasise two major drawbacks on environment and conservation. First, the colonial government created pressure on resources through its Land Tenure Act of 1930 that was furthered by the Land Tenure Act of 1969 (Vudzijena 1998) – systems which took away land from the majority population

constituency and gave it to the minority. This mounted pressure on the environment in the countryside, thereby compromising human security, conservational capabilities of the rural communities as well as their agricultural production. This is confirmed by Phimister (1974), Mackenzie (1970), Iliffe (1990) and Hanlon et al (2013) who argue that the wanton undercutting of African peasant production through the Land Tenure Act sowed the seeds of underdevelopment in the reserves of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and undermined resource conservation in the reserves. On a similar note, Mukamuri (1995a: iii, emphasis mine) observes that “historical interviews and records clearly demonstrate that communal life has never been sustainable since the dawn of colonialism. ... The communal system has always been disturbed and challenged by the colonial state’s latifundialisation, *that is, swallowing up the land of the poor*, pauperisation and declined standards of livelihood”. Ribot (1999) and Mandondo (2000) argue along the same lines with Mukamuri’s observation, noting that colonial natural resource management policies resulted in over-centralisation because they were designed in the context of conquest and subjugation. Thus, it is beyond doubt that the colonial government impacted negatively on the local people’s relations with the environment. This is why it is now generally agreed that Europeans did not only colonise humans [in Africa] but also nature (see Plumwood 2003; MacKenzi 1991; Anderson and Grove 1987), that is, other beings found in the African worlds.

Second, instead of seeking ways to integrate productively “indigenous”/ local people’s ways of knowing and modern scientific ways of knowing in the national conservation infrastructure of the time, the colonial government despised local knowledge and relegated all conservation practices based on indigenous practices and thinking as unscientific and backward. Mukamuri (1995a: 18-19) captures this aptly when he applies Fox’s savage slot model to explain the attitudes of the colonial government towards the knowledge and practices of local people. According to Fox (1991), the slot was understood as a partial or simple model of the world in which values, knowledge (for example, of the environment and conservation), and meanings only diffuse in one direction, in this case, from the West to the rest of the world. Based on his analysis of Fox’s savage slot, Mukamuri (1995a: 18) argues that there is no doubt that colonial settlers found themselves as having no obligation whatsoever to seek to understand the Africans’ farming systems and conservation practices. Ranger (1999: 57) also citing Richardson (1912) validates Mukamuri’s observation when he writes of Matopos Hills that:

In the African inhabited areas of the Matopos foothills, ‘there are a hundred thousand cords of firewood waiting for the axe, while close to the mines practically nothing is left’. The threat to indigenous woodland, then, is clearly from commercial mining rather than from African

agriculture. Nonetheless, the view took hold that western science was needed in order to save the flora of the Matopos from black aggression of indifference.

Mukamuri, thus, agrees with Page and Page's (1991: 5, emphasis mine) observation that the colonial settlers thought they had "little or nothing to learn from native agriculture *and conservation methods* they used". Mukamuri's observation also resonates with Fairhead and Leach's (1995) study which reveals the misreading and misinterpretation of socio-environmental disruption in West Africa by social scientists and policy makers. Instead, the duo attributes degradation in West Africa to the effects of the twin project of colonialism and modernity which disregard local conservation practices and epistemologies. All this suggests that the colonial government in Zimbabwe, as elsewhere in Africa, failed to realise that in indigenous practices and philosophy of life were knowledge forms that people in the "subaltern" (Mignolo 2000) had used successfully for centuries in conserving their environment and to promote social harmony between humans and all other beings in the environment (cf Moyo et al 1991; Mawere and Kadenge 2010; Mawere 2013a). The advent of (formal) science in Zimbabwe, with its nature/culture dichotomies, distorted the understandings of the environment as were held by the local people. Some species which the locals considered valuable such as edible insects, for example, were judged less important by humans who saw themselves as both owners and controllers of nature. Hence such beings/organisms were not accorded priority in the colonial government's conservation agenda.

Upon independence in 1980, the Zimbabwean government appeared to commit itself to rectifying the problems left behind by the colonial regime. There seemed to be a paradigmatic shift from state-centred control towards alternative conservation and natural resource approaches in which local people would play a central role (see Murphree 1991). In fact, in the 1980 "National Conservation Strategy", the post independence government vowed to arrest the mounting land degradation and promote sustainable land management by publishing Zimbabwe's National Conservation Strategy through the Natural Resource Board, now the Environmental Management Agency (EMA), Zimbabwe Forestry Commission, Agricultural, Technical and Extension Services (AGRITEX), and Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZPWMA). This was partly in response to the request for all nations by the World Conservation Strategy report of the International Union for Conservation of Nature-United Nations Environment Programme-World Wide Fund for Nature (IUCN-UNEP-WWF), 1980. While this was a gesture towards the conservation of all species, I argue that the postcolonial government – like its colonial predecessor – failed the national conservation project in two respects. First, the post-colonial government, particularly through its National Environmental

Policy and Strategy employed Western science as the sole tool for environmental conservation, thereby continuing to relegate local eco-knowledge to the periphery of national environmental conservation projects. My experience during fieldwork suggests that there is a sense in which it can be argued that this stance blurs the possibility of different ways of thinking about relationships between people and other beings such as forest insects. Even the most recent Zimbabwe National Environmental Policy and Strategy (ZNEPS) is notably silent on the moral value and rights of the country's flora and fauna, which in view of the modernistic stance that ZNEPS has taken makes the silence more than just a species omission, but actually a problem of paradigm. Exclusively informed by Western science, ZNEPS (2009:7) thus discriminates against the other beings inhabiting the environment such as insects as it states: "At species level, the country supports an estimated 4,440 vascular plant species, 196 mammal species, 672 bird species, 156 reptile species, 57 species of amphibians, 132 fish species and uncounted numbers of species in other groups. The diversity of microorganisms in particular is extremely poorly known". The current environmental policy of Zimbabwe, therefore, has no specific clause that provides for the protection of forest insects. As is seen in the quotation above, one can see that insect species are not well recognised in Zimbabwe's environmental policy despite the contribution that most of these insects make to human livelihoods and to ecosystems as a whole. We can only assume that insects, together with other small organisms, are those being referred to as "uncounted species in other groups" (ZNEPS, 2009:7). Some fauna and flora are clearly more equal than others!

In view of this observation, one would wonder if some entities in the "natural" environment do not deserve to live as any other species. It also remains highly questionable if not all of the unmentioned species (in ZNEPS), such as insects, are not helpful to the "natural" environment or human lives in one way or another. Yet, elsewhere some insects such as bees were used extensively in warfare in as early as the 16th century Roman empire (see Kosek 2010). Other insects such as beetles were used by the Emir of Bukhara in serving militarised campaigns and torture, to eat the flesh of his prisoners (see Lockwood 2008); during World War 1, the bee became central to the war machine not as a projectile but as a source of beeswax that was used to coat almost all ammunition (see Sinks 1944: 8; Kosek 2010). During World War II in Germany, Japan, Russia, and the United States, hundreds of millions of insects were cultivated and tens of millions of beetles and mosquitoes were deployed to infest crops, soldiers, and civilians (see Lockwood 2008). Also, the General Ishii Shiro released hundreds of millions of infected insects across China during World War II, causing the deaths of tens of thousands of people (see Lockwood 2008). In the Korean War, U.S. airplanes dropped plague-infested fleas

on North Korea and later used mosquitoes, wasps, and bees as part of torture techniques against the Vietcong in Vietnam (see Kosek 2010); during the Cold War, crop-eating beetles were dropped on Vietnam, North Korea, and Cuba, along the way fostering research that transformed modern entomology (see Lockwood 2008; Tucker and Edmund 2004). In the war on terror, the Bush administration approve the practice of placing bees and spiders in confinement boxes as part of the torture of U.S. detainee Abu Zubaydah (see Scherer 2009; Kosek 2010). Even today, bees are used to detect certain scents – of landmines, for example – by placing traces of the explosive chemicals near food sources (see Bromenshenk et al. 2003; Hanson 2006); and some insects such as *harurwa* act as participants in environment conservation in south-eastern Zimbabwe. Thus in view of all these relations between humans and insects, one could ask: do we [humans] have no relationships with insects that ZNEPS, and by extension modernistic ontologies on governance, could afford a not-so-explicit acknowledgement of their [insects] presence in the network of life and wellbeing? It is from this critical questioning that one can realise that the ZNEPS has failed to acknowledge the role of indigenous epistemologies in conservation and to not accord some ‘rights’ and moral worthy to other beings in the ‘natural’ environment such as forest insects. Put differently, ZNEPS is uncritical of modernist ontologies on governance. Besides, it is contrary to locals’ conservation practices in many rural communities (such as Norumedzo) where because fauna and flora are viewed as *zvistikwa* (other beings/things that were created by God), they are socially and morally acknowledged as worthwhile entities; both flora and fauna (such as insects) matter for the Norumedzo people.

The second reason for government’s failure to realise and integrate local knowledge and philosophy of life forms is rooted from the post-independence government’s embarking on farm invasions particularly from around 1999/2000. The invasions were politically motivated, characterised by exploitation of resources and disrespect of other beings. They violated the rights of both humans (especially White commercial farmers) and other beings, and exerted pressure on natural resources and the environment in general. In addition to violation of human rights and indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources (see Wolmer, Chaumba and Scoones 2001; Cross 2009), the invaders disregarded the value of indigenous epistemologies and other social “actors” in conservation like forest insects. This precipitated environmental conservation problems in the country, and to an unimagined compromise on the locals’ sources of livelihood; hence my argument that both the colonial and post-colonial governments are to blame for conservation problems in Zimbabwe.

Yet, this study looks beyond the shortcomings of both the colonial and post-colonial governments and the contestations existent around issues of conservation as it seeks to stress the important role that other social actors in the environment such as insects (for example *harurwa*) play, and contribute to dialogue as ways through which the environmental problems in Zimbabwe could be resolved. In the next section, I therefore discuss the place of insects, *harurwa* in Zimbabwe (from which south-eastern Zimbabwe and in particular Norumedzo is drawn as the case study for this study).

***Harurwa* in Zimbabwe**

Though the practice of eating insects (such as mopane worms/*amacimbi*/*madora*, locusts, *harurwa*) is not limited to Zimbabwe and has been documented in nearly every part of the world (Hobane 1995; Roberts 1998; Durst 2010; Kosek 2010), the central place of some of these insects such as *harurwa* in forest conservation, social cohesion, economic networks and cultural preservation is yet to be realised in Zimbabwe. Insects have been under-researched and their importance as well as their complex and intimate relationships with humans undermined over the years (cf. Raffles 2012). Raffles (2012: 3) had this to say of insects:

... Sometime after that time but still long before our time, there were insects. For as long as we have been here, they have been there too. Wherever we have travelled, they have been there too. And still, we don't know them very well, not even the ones we are closest to ... Who are they, these beings so different from us and from each other? What do they do? What worlds do they make? What do we make of them? How do we live with them? How could we live with them differently? ... The stuff of economy and culture ... Not just deeply present in the world but deeply there, creating it, too.

What Raffles says of insects, especially that they are not well researched in terms of their complex and intimate relationships with humans and other beings, is germane to this study given that the insects, *harurwa*, have received little attention from scholars in Zimbabwe over the years. This is in spite of the fact that *harurwa* have served as a source of livelihood for groups of people and as a drive to forest conservation in south-eastern Zimbabwe. In view of this argument, this study examines the ways in which local everyday thought around *harurwa* and conservation offers the beginnings of a very different kind of conversation about conservation of the natural environment. In this study more focus on the humans' relationships with land, water and

vegetation is given and networks and interactions between humans, the environment in general and in particular *harurwa* are examined.

The religious and cultural significance of *harurwa* and *jiri* is further accentuated by a great deal of local communities' practices and beliefs around the natural preservation of this matrix (people, state, forests, *vadzimu*, *mbondoro*, and *harurwa*). For example, there are numerous folktales surrounding the disruption of the balance of the natural ecosystem among residents of the Bikita District. In particular, practices that include deforestation, saying obscene words in forests and burning forests are positively associated with angering ancestors (Fieldnotes, June 2012). Such social practices are believed to trigger misfortunes and possibly lead to the extinction of *harurwa*.

The enigma and the genesis of *harurwa* remain shrouded in mystery because of the often contradictory accounts on the origins of these precious insects (Maredza 1985; Makuku 1993a, 1993b). This necessitates research on insects such as *harurwa*. Research on insects in general has been patchy for three major reasons: the bad reputation some insects such as *harurwa* have as unhygienic during harvesting, because they stain harvesters' hands; the association of some insects such as *harurwa* with traditional beliefs and rituals that are considered anti-Christian and scientifically despised, and the blame laid on some 'blacklisted' insect species such as mosquito and tsetse fly as transmitters of malaria and sleeping sickness respectively (also see Murombedzi 1994; Bonger 1999; Capinera 2010; Mavhunga and Spierenburg 2007). This way, disease transmission to the exclusion of benefits that some insects (such as *harurwa*, bees etc) bring forth to humanity and to the ecosystem in general has been emphasised by many researchers.

Why *harurwa*?

Given *harurwa*'s significance in forest conservation and as an increasingly important source of livelihood for the people in south-eastern Zimbabwe, forest insects and *harurwa* in particular, present an opportunity to unravel the problem of conservation knowledge linked with social relations and the natural environment. This study, therefore, seeks to understand the interaction-based social relations and networks nurtured between forests, forest insects and the Norumedzo people, as the latter pursue their livelihoods and forest conservation practices. This research, thus, strives to closely examine ways through which *harurwa* could illuminate our understanding of environmental conservation in Zimbabwe. This is achieved by examining the role *harurwa* play in local environmental practices in Norumedzo Community to determine whether this understanding is sustainable; to examine ethnographically whether the environmental practices

associated with *harurwa* – in their complex entanglements with everyday life – make it a resource for promoting biodiversity conservation in Zimbabwe; and to promote a “generative dialogue” (Verran 2011) on contending approaches to conservation such as science and other forms of conservation knowledge. As Verran argues, such a dialogue opens possibilities for contending approaches (to knowledge) to acknowledge the importance of each other. In view of this research, generative dialogue opens up possibilities to consider humans and other beings as a collective and as interdependent members of the universe they share.

This study also strives to gain new insights into humans and other beings interactions with respect to environmental conservation in Zimbabwe’s rural communities (for more on environmental conservation problems in Zimbabwe see Moyo *et al* 1991; Mukamuri 1995a; Marongwe 2004). I contend that understanding the problems and interactions between humans and other beings allow for both individual and collective knowledge construction and reflexivity in natural resource conservation based on local practices. My argument is that the Norumedzo Forest is a window from which inferences about these relations can be made.⁵ In view of this argument and using findings from Norumedzo conservation practices, heretofore referred to as Norumedzo, my study seeks to explore models of relational networks that serve as intervention to conservation problems in many rural communities in Zimbabwe.

Research questions

Given that the main aim of this study is to investigate the relationships between humans, forests, forest insects and other beings, the following main research question will be examined: How do the constituent components of forest conservation, production and harvesting of insects and human dependence on insects cohere with a healthy, sustainable, and balanced ecosystem in contemporary Zimbabwe and in the Norumedzo Community in particular? In order to find answers to this question, the study will gather data that explores the following secondary questions: What is the social relationship between *harurwa*, humans, forests, *mbondoro*, *vadzimu*, *Mwari* and the state of rural livelihoods in Zimbabwe? How do the Norumedzo people’s conceptions of personhood affect conservation and *harurwa* – human relations in the Norumedzo? How do human fears, desires and interests become part of the physical form of the insects, *harurwa*? What is the place of *harurwa* in local thought regarding the protection and

⁵ Environmental conservation in rural communities is highly complex to fully unpack given the limited study of the participants’ interactions.

rehabilitation of the *jiri* forests, and associated ways of being in the world? What has been the impact of human activities on the social organisation of *harurwa*? What is the perceived contribution of *harurwa* in local, political and socio-economic networks? How have the political problems of Zimbabwe affected the insects, *harurwa*? What are the key factors that lead to some communal areas' residents cooperating to collectively manage natural resources in their areas? What are the key lessons to be learnt from local management practices in Norumedzo for common property resource management in other rural areas in Zimbabwe? How do social tensions and [village] politics affect resource conservation in rural communities? These are some of the questions I grapple with in this dissertation as it unfolds.

The importance of studying humans and other beings relationships

Studying the complex nuances, networks and subtleties between humans, insects, forests, *vadzimu*, *Mwari*, and the state is critical to establishing sustainable social relations and network-based interactions between humans and other beings. This is because unpacking the networks between humans, forests and insects, in particular *harurwa*, would be useful in rethinking the divisions made between humans and other beings, and between nature and society as well as strategies for sustainable environmental management. It can be emphasised that this research is important in that it examines using ethnographic methods the anthropology of forest insects and *harurwa* in particular in the local political and economic networks. Besides, the research is important in that it examines the potential contribution of people's relationships with other beings such as forest insects and in particular *harurwa* to environmental conservation of forests in rural communities. More importantly, the work examines how human politics, fears, desires and interests become part of the physical form of the insects, *harurwa* and humans by exploring possible ways in which the 'local theory' of *hunhu* (*chivanhu*) or ubuntu is part of local environmentality. As previously alluded to, *ubuntu* is a cohesive multi-faceted moral value that fosters unity, oneness, solidarity and harmony between people and other beings in the environment. It is defined by Varumedzo with reference to modes of engagement or interaction between people and other beings in the world, and offers a ontological framework for rethinking the post-colonial Zimbabwean government's environmental policies that are grounded in Western scientific notions of nature that treat humans and nature as binaries. An anthropological approach based on my proposed perspective – engagement zones theory expanded in chapter 3 – and some aspects of post-humanism (as indicated earlier in my opening section), instead investigates networks and relations between humans, insects, *vadzimu*, *mbondoro*, state and forests,

and advocates for the inclusion of neglected (in the national conservation project) practices of everyday life like local conservation practices.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution in a subject area of Environmental Anthropology and Environmental Studies that are of vital interest to researchers and policy-makers in Southern Africa. While scholars such as Makuku (1993a, 1993b) and Teffo (2006) draw attention to the studies of *harurwa* in Southern Africa, some gaps are left out. Teffo, for example, examines the nutritional and medicinal value of *harurwa* (in the Limpopo province of South Africa) without paying significant attention to their (*harurwa*) contribution to forest conservation and local economy. Makuku too draws attention to *harurwa* and the Norumedzo *Jiri* as a success story in sustaining local livelihoods. The present study goes beyond both Teffo and Makuku's works in that it does not only draw attention to the Norumedzo *Jiri* as an example for environmentalists to learn or draw lessons from, but argues that indigenous conservation epistemologies can play a fundamental role in complementing conservation efforts to manage the environment and sustain livelihoods. This is done with a deliberate view to promoting multiple conservation knowledges and to overcoming the kinds of normative distinctions between the livelihood approach (cf. Scoones 1998, 2009) and a symbolic, cultural approach, as these divisions are not a feature of peoples' (locals) understandings so much as the perspectives of scholarly debates that have intellectual roots elsewhere. Moreover, tracking how forest residents' epistemic frames are manifested in virtual interactions with other beings/actors could be useful for conservationists interested in assessing the contribution of 'locals' daily practices and systematic interventions to conservation in rural communities.

Theoretical framework of the study

In this section, I discuss the theoretical framework that provides the epistemological lenses that frame my study.

Using the theoretical lens of network analysis, which is an antithesis of social wholes approach, this study strives to interpret and achieve "thick description" (Geertz 1983:6) of the networks, social interconnectedness, and relationships between edible stinkbugs – *harurwa* –, people, forests, ecosystem and the state from the standpoint of those who experience these networks and relations which might be referred to as 'empirical relationalism'. This means that the theoretical lens deployed in this study is grounded in ethnography which also justifies why ethnographic fieldwork was the primary approach to carry out this study as is discussed in detail

in chapter 1. Ethnography is “an interpretive act of ‘thick description’ achieved through immersion in the lives of the informants over a length period of time” (Geertz 1983: 6). In this study, ethnography is used to study the daily “life worlds” of research subjects and how they manage their natural environment – the locals’ routines, stories, beliefs, fears, anxieties and relational networks. Ethnography is furthermore used to address locals’ perspectives of: *harurwa*, the environment, conservation knowledges, daily practices and their views of life and the world. This framework enables me (as the researcher) to observe the value of commensurability of local beliefs about forest conservation and insect protection – and multiple perspectives (religious, cultural, social, historical, and economic) between humans, the ecosystem and other beings. Put differently, the framework I employ in this study – network analysis – affords the researcher the opportunity to examine and explore the interdependence and relational networks between rural livelihoods, bio-diversification and the environment as a whole.

In view of the theoretical framework used to frame this study, I emphasise that the central argument raised in this study is that although mutual relations between humans and other beings are crucial for fostering meaningful environment conservation in rural communities, studying these relations in face-to-face contact is hard and using them in national conservation projects such as those of Zimbabwe is a challenge. This is because of the thinking of some scholars that there is a binary and asymmetrical relation between humans and other beings – a thinking drawn from the Western enlightenment separation of humans (as society/culture) and all that is left out as nature. This thinking has enjoyed support even in Zimbabwe’s current national conservation agenda. To overcome the aforementioned thinking by such scholars, I offer a critique of network theories such as relational ontology and posthumanism – theories which in fact have the same foundational basis and attempt to explain humans and other beings relations. This is to say that the critique offered in this study is not meant to legitimise but to enhance the aforementioned theories in such a way that they become more relevant and applicable to contexts such as Norumedzo Communal Area. As such, I point out their weaknesses in relation to conservation practices in the Norumedzo before I advance a network perspective I tentatively call “engagement zones perspective”. This perspective, which is briefly discussed in chapter and expanded in chapter 3, makes an attempt to overcome the downsides of network theories such as post-humanism and relational ontology by explaining relationships and interconnectedness between humans and other beings in the Norumedzo in relation to traditional institutions and without reducing humans and nonhumans to one another or compromising human dignity and the essence of humanity. To this effect, engagement zones perspective also offers an explanation that cover up for the inapplicable aspects (to contexts such

as Norumedzo) in Ingold (2011) and Fairhead and Leach's (2005) conceptions of meshworks and social networks respectively; concepts which also explore some aspects of post-humanism and relational ontology that include connections and lines of life. Besides my proposed engagement zones perspective, I argue for critical "border thinking" (Saldivar 1997) in view of environment conservation practices in the Norumedzo Communal Area. Border thinking "is an epistemic perspective that critically responds to both hegemonic and marginal fundamentalisms" (Grosfoguel 2011: 2; 2006) – it is an approach that is critical and questions all alternative ways of knowing whether Western science or subaltern ways of knowing. It also rethinks relations between people and other beings. The aforementioned approach could be the best vantage point for grasping and unpacking humans – other beings network based relations and interactions in the environment they share; hence the relevance of the theoretical framework – network analysis – used to frame this study.

CHAPTER 1: Fieldwork Site Background and Methodological Issues

Entering the fieldwork site

It was on a Friday in December 2011 that I arrived at my fieldwork site, Norumedzo Communal Area (NCA) to start my ethnographic fieldwork in Masvingo Province, south-eastern Zimbabwe. I had already talked to the School Development Committee (SDC) chair and the School Head of Machirara, a high school in the Norumedzo Area where I would reside for the next twelve-and-a-half months while doing fieldwork in the area. I was fortunate to have met the SDC chair and school head at Nyika Growth Point with a young teacher, Mr Tendai Uriga, who is the younger brother of an old friend with whom I had studied during my first year at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) in 2000. He told me he had been with the school for 5 years, since 2007, and was quite familiar with the local people and the area itself. He readily agreed to be one of my research assistants, and to share accommodation with me at school, if the School Head and his School Development Committee (SDC) agreed. It was a week before school closing and students were no longer receiving lessons, but came to school to pass time while waiting for their end of term results.

At Nyika Growth Point where I had boarded the bus to my fieldwork site, I had informed the driver that I was going to Machirara High School, some 23 kms away, but was not familiar with the area. He had promised that he would drop me at Machirara turn off about 1,5km off-road. Since it was the December summer season, the vegetation was all green on both sides of the road. We travelled a tarred road for about 17 kms before we reached Silveira Mission School and Hospital, and then entered into a small winding gravel road up the rugged mountains, swaying as the driver negotiated the curves.

Soon, it was only the driver and I in the bus. All other passengers had been dropped off/disenbarked. That is when I asked the driver if Machirara was still far. “Oh my Lord! I forgot”, he exclaimed as he struggled to stop the bus in the pot-holed rugged road. He had taken me to Norumedzo Primary School, some two and half kilometres away from where he should have dropped me off. “I am sorry my dear, I was absorbed in some other things”, he apologised. It was unfortunate that he could not take me back to the Machirara turn-off as his fuel to Nyika Growth Point the following day would not be sufficient. As a gesture of understanding, he asked me to leave some of my groceries in his bus promising to bring them the following day as he would be going to Nyika. It was 12:20 in the afternoon when I was dropped close to the

Norumedzo Primary School, with a long walk ahead of me. I was already tired as the gravel road we travelled on was rugged and potholed.

When I was left alone, I could see that I was in a valley area bordered by two mountain ranges. I started imagining walking all the distance back alone on a mountainous road and wished I had my own car. I looked around and could see a vast thick forest in the far northeastern side of the road. For some time, I stood appreciating the beauty of the forest from a distance. “Now I am in a different area!” I said to myself. As I walked, I met some school children along the road, on their way from Norumedzo Primary School. The forest was the Norumedzo *Jiri*, they told me, and the two mountain ranges running parallel to each other in the south and the north were the Rumedzo and the Nemahwi Mountains.

After walking for about one and half kilometres in the company of the children, they arrived at their respective homes. I was alone again. Looking on the sides of the road, I could see some boys herding cattle. Some parents could also be seen working in the fields. In some homesteads along the road, I could see little children playing, running after each other. Of the homesteads I saw scattered on the sides of the road, some houses were neatly thatched but others were in bad shape. Others had asbestos roofing. As I continued walking, I finally saw the junction – a small gravel and heavily pot-holed road branching northwards. Besides the junction was an old sign post written, “Machirara High School, 1.5 km”. It was surrounded by thick shrubs, the reason why I had missed it when we passed by on the bus.

At 2 o’clock in the afternoon, I arrived at Machirara High School, some two and half kilometres from the Norumedzo *Jiri*. The school was located approximately at the centre of Norumedzo Communal Area. I was welcomed by the headmaster and some teachers, including my research assistant, Mr Tendai Uriga. I was immediately shown to my allocated room in a house I had to share with my research assistant. Having heard of my difficulties in travelling there, he quickly gave me some water to take a bath. I could now feel better after the bath but since it was a hot day, I asked him if we could sit outside the house to enjoy the fresh air. As we were seated, I could see some scattered homesteads across the other side of the teachers’ cottage and heavily forested hills on the West and on the East. After resting for about three hours, we went to the borehole, some 50m away from our house to draw water for use that evening. Tendai prepared supper for both of us that day.

Early the next morning, he and I set for our tour around the Norumedzo Communal Area. Since it was a Saturday, he was available to take me around the villages in the area. Most of

the people we met along the way and in the villages welcomed us as they knew him. Of particular interest was meeting Mr Mabhodho Mugumisi, one of the *harurwa* administrators for 2011. The wife of Mr Mugumisi was a distant relative of Tendai and they already knew each other very well. After my research assistant introduced me, Mrs Mugumisi started preparing us some breakfast while we were talking to her husband and son, James. I did not want to have the breakfast but Tendai reminded me that it was considered bad manners to refuse food in the village especially from a relative like Mrs Mugumisi. So, we had our breakfast together as we continued our conversation with Mr Mugumisi and James, in which I learnt James was born and grew up in the area, and had dropped out of school some years back when he was doing Form 3 at Machirara mainly due to financial constraints. Now, he was specialising in gardening and on *harurwa* care taking/guarding and selling when it was *harurwa* season. Certainly, he had vast experiences and knowledge about *harurwa* and the *jiri*. I asked if he was available to be my second research assistant, and he agreed. Given that he was not attending school, he would take me around the villages during week days when Mr Uriga was at work. So we talked for about two hours before we dearly thanked Mr and Mrs Mugumisi for the hospitality and bade farewell. James was asked to take us out of the yard. This was now the right opportunity to ask James if he would be willing to be my second research assistant, the one I would normally work with during school days when my other research assistant would be at work. Fortunately, he readily accepted the proposal.

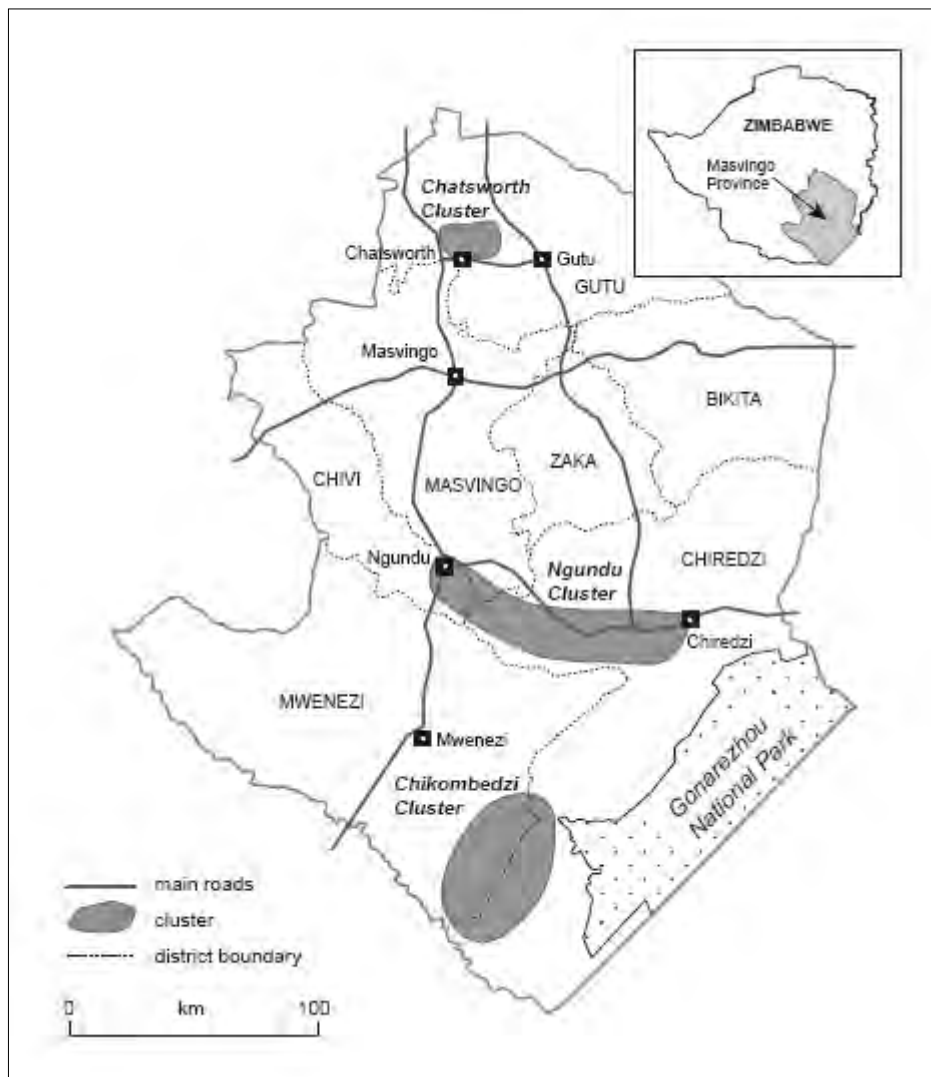
When James returned, we continued with our tour around the village. I was very happy about having made such a good start. As we made our way through small winding paths in the bush, we could hear the sounds of singing birds from all sides. We did not go to the *jiri* that day as James had promised to take me there the following Monday, and in the late afternoon, we headed back to our place of residence at Machirara (see figure 1).



Figure 1: My place of residence at Machirara High School during fieldwork

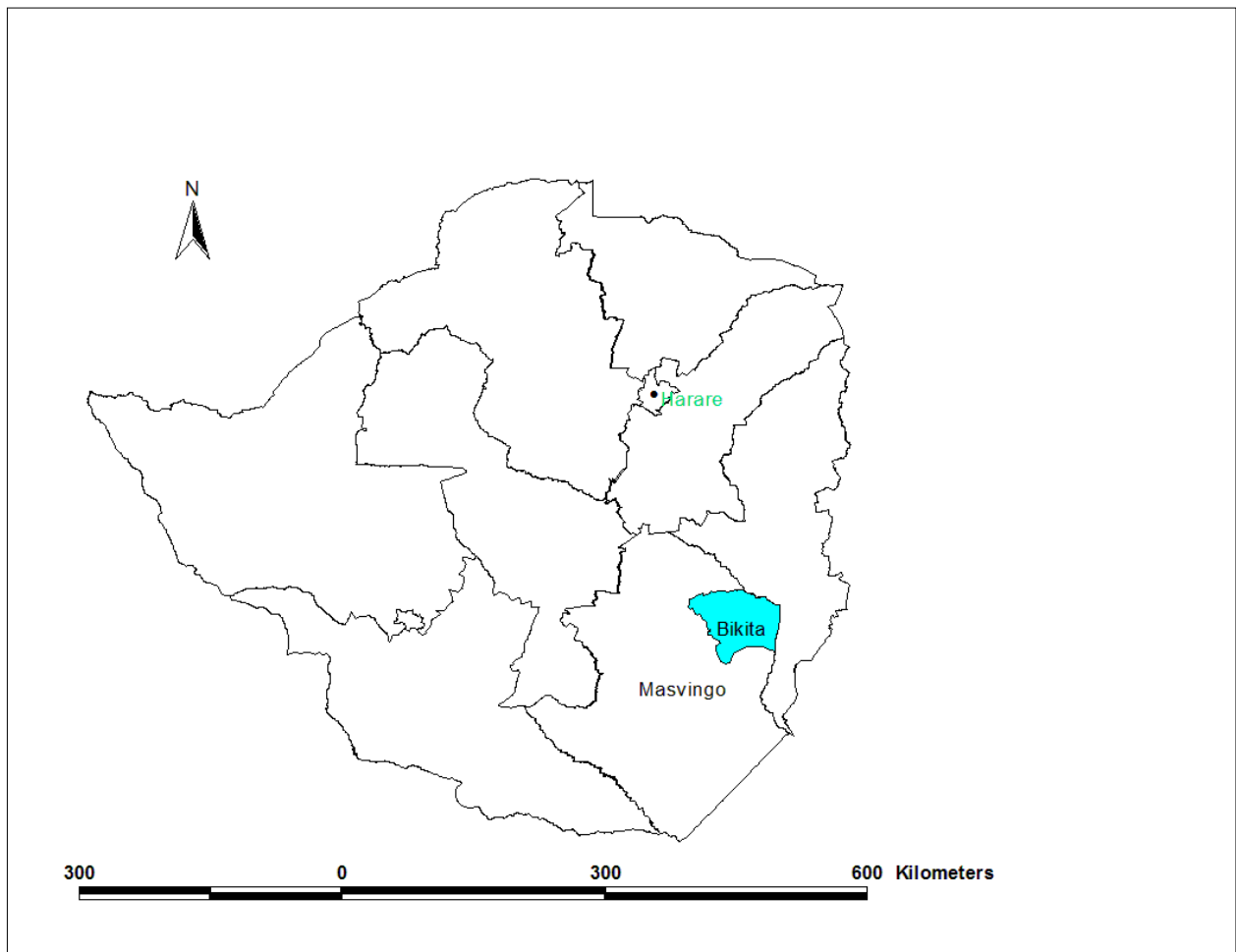
Study Area: Norumedzo Communal Area

The Norumedzo Communal Area (which includes the Norumedzo *jiri*) in which research was conducted, located is in south-eastern Zimbabwe in ward 15 of Bikita District in Masvingo Province. See maps 1, 2 and 3 below which consecutively show the seven districts of Masvingo including Bikita, the eight provinces of Zimbabwe including Masvingo where Bikita is found, and Bikita district where Norumedzo Communal Area (and Norumedzo *Jiri*) is found.



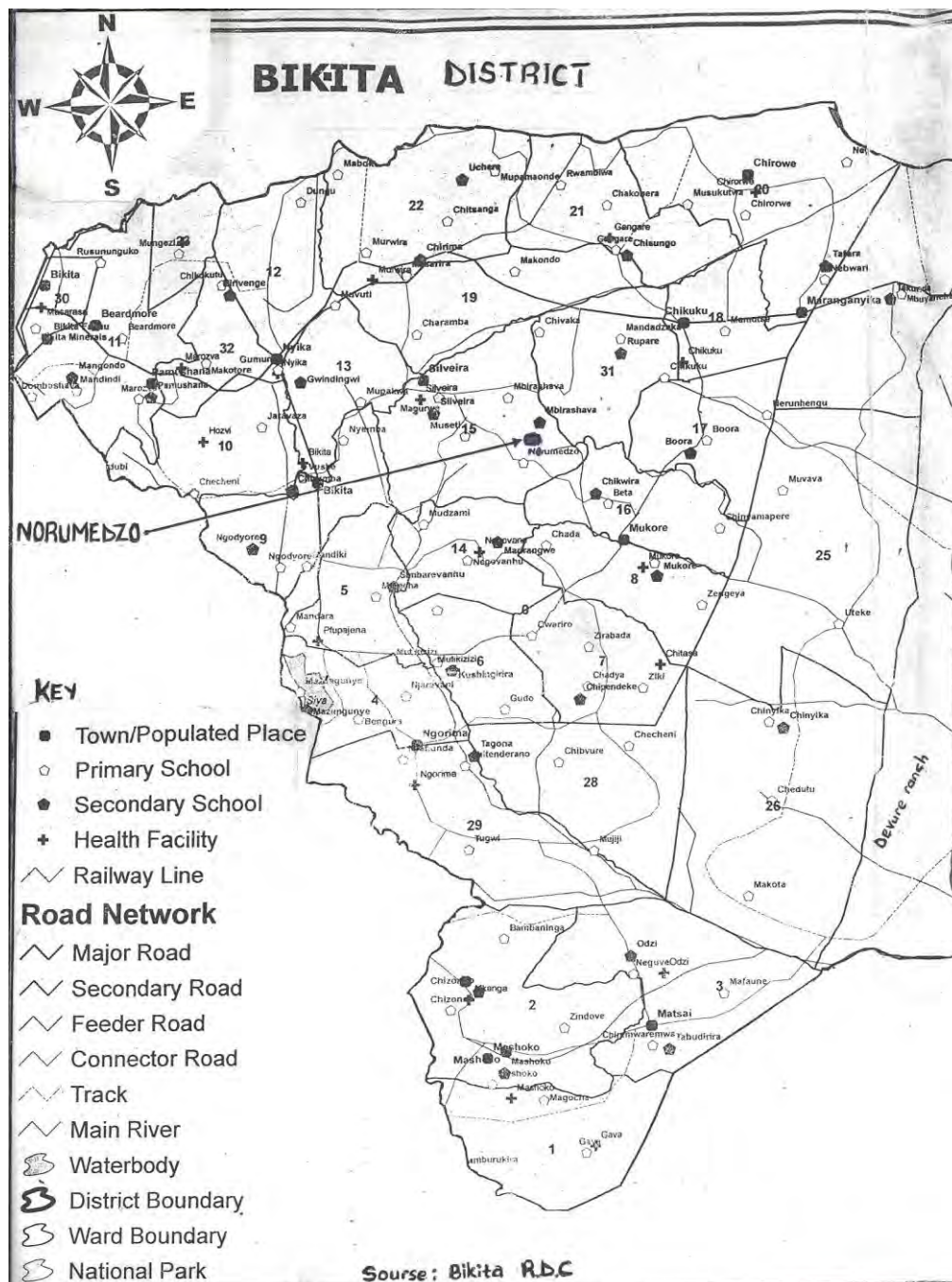
Map 1: *The seven districts of Masvingo including Bikita.*

(Source: Bikita Rural District Council, 23 July 2012).



Map 2: *The eight provinces of Zimbabwe including Masvingo where Bikita District is found*

(Source: Bikita Rural District Council, 23 July 2012).



Map 3: Bikita Rural District where Norumedzo communal area is found.

(Source: Bikita Rural District Council, 23 July 2012).

The Norumedzo Community occupies an area between Chivaka, Gande and Chinyagashu Rivers in the Bikita District. The area is occupied mainly by the Varumedzo also known as Norumedzo people (as the villagers call themselves), who are also known as the Duma people of the *Moyo* (heart) totem. According to the Varumedzo, as a result of a historical conflict between the

Norumedzo and Mazungunye people (of the same family lineage as the Norumedzo people), anyone installed as Chief Mazungunye is not allowed to set foot in the Norumedzo except under special circumstances of which the latter can only enter blindfolded and on a stretcher (not walking) (Plowden 1978).

Bikita District as a whole has 32 administration wards including two wards that belong to parastatals (namely Devure Ranch and Bikita Minerals), and three others in commercial farms in the district namely wards 23, 28 and 29. Part of Bikita District known as the Norumedzo Communal Area occupies approximately 50 square kilometres and with 5445 households and a total population of 22 160, according to the (Bikita Rural District Memorandum of April 2010). The area is well known in the district and beyond due to the presence of a “sacred” forest (the Norumedzo *Jiri*) and edible insects locally named *harurwa* (edible stinkbugs), which inhabit the *jiri*. Fifty-six villages make Norumedzo Communal Area – villages that surround the *jiri* – include forty-four registered and twelve unregistered ones. The twelve villages were reported to have been unregistered due to chieftainship and headmen succession conflicts. One of the unregistered village headmen, Mr Tapera (not his real name) confided to me during an interview:

If the issue of Norumedzo chieftainship is not yet addressed, it is difficult for me to be officially registered as a headman even though the number of people under my jurisdiction is the same or even higher than that of other registered village heads. Given the case that there is power vacuum in the Norumedzo chieftainship, there is no one who can register me officially as a village head. I am not the only village head with this problem. We are more than ten village heads under Norumedzo who have not been officially registered as village headmen for the same reason.

The Norumedzo Forest, locally named *jiri*, is a natural forest of about 7 km². Besides being home to riverine wetlands, rivers, bees, wildlife, and wild fruits, *jiri* is rich in edible insects locally named *harurwa* (edible stinkbugs) that are used by the Norumedzo people as food and a source of income, among other uses. The origin of *harurwa* is explained in a myth about the forefathers of the Norumedzo people. Given the social, cultural and economic value of the insects, the *harurwa* are cared for in the *jiri* by a caretaker team comprising *madzishe eharurwa* (*harurwa* administrators) and *mapurisa eharurwa* (*harurwa* policemen) led by one of the Norumedzo headmen selected by the chief.

Norumedzo people are one of the few forest-dependent communities of Zimbabwe where mutual, symbiotic coexistence of humans, *harurwa* and other beings is still highly regarded. Because the Norumedzo people largely depend on the *jiri* for their livelihood, there are connections between the people and other beings in the *jiri* including *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits), *masvikiro* (spirit mediums), *mbondoro* (ancestral lion spirits), fauna and flora. All these variables are

believed by the Varumedzo to be working together for the good of the society, and executing its function. This organisation of things is germane to Malinowski's (1922) functionalism with which he argued that culture functioned to meet the needs of individuals who comprise a society, and once these individual needs are met, then the needs of society are met. For Malinowski, the feelings, behaviour, opinions, relational modes, and beliefs of a people were crucial to understand how society works. Similarly, the Varumedzo relate and are connected to each other and the environment in a way that allows their needs to be met. The connectedness between the Varumedzo and other beings is normally through *miko/zviera* (taboos) that forbid people from certain behaviours that may upset other beings. This connectedness between humans and other beings should not be mistaken to mean that all beings have a spiritual nature or what other scholars refer to as soul (Ogungbemi 1997). Yet through *zviera*, certain plants or plant species are considered sacred and are not used for firewood. I observed, for example, that the tree species that were considered as sacred and normally reserved for use as medicines, *harurwa* habitats, for fruits, and not for firewood were these: *muroro/Annona senegalensis*, *munhengeni/Ximenia caffra*, *mukute/Syzygium cordatum*, *muroropasi/Annona stenophylla*, *muzhanje/Uapaca kirkiana*, *mukarati/Burkea Africana*, *muonde/Ficus spp.*, *muchirara*, *mushozhova/Pseudolachnostylis maprouneifolia*. Other trees such as *muunga Acacia abyssinica*, *muuzhe/Brachystegia glaucescens*, *mutondo/Julbernardia globiflora*, *mubvamaropa/Pterocarpus angolensis*, *mubvumira/Kirkia acuminata*, *muchirara/Pterocarpus rotundifolius*, and *musasa/Brachystegia spiciformis* were mainly reserved as *harurwa* habitats. Others such as *murwiti/Dalbergia melanoxylon*, *mususu/Terminalia serecea*, and *mukarati/Burkea Africana* were mainly reserved for carving, wood for furniture and also as *harurwa* habitats. All these tree species could be found both inside and outside the *jiri*, but they are found in abundance in the *jiri*, hence the *jiri* comprises different plant tree species and fauna. It is from this *jiri* richness and the dependence of the Norumedzo people on the *jiri* flora and fauna that one can safely say the Norumedzo people are still largely forest-dependent.

In terms of relations with flora, the general belief in the Norumedzo Communal Area is that for those tree species believed to be sacred, one would be followed by misfortunes if s/he fails to observe traditional beliefs relating to the tree species. The same belief is held for the *jiri* itself. No one is allowed to say obscene things when walking in the *jiri*, as this is believed to anger the *vadzimu* (ancestors) who in turn may invoke a bad omen on the perpetrator. This resonates with McGregor's (2003) observation among the Tonga people of Zambezi Valley, in northern Zimbabwe, who, she notes, mediated their relationship with the river, Zambezi through ancestral spirits.

One other important thing to note about the Norumedzo Area is that it receives low to medium but variable rainfall per annum, lacks basic infrastructure such as tarred roads, piped water and electricity, and relies to a greater extent on remittances from the Norumedzo Forest (*jiri*). It, however, shares boundaries with the Bikita highlands classified under region 3 receiving up to 800mm. The Norumedzo people, thus, largely depend on *harurwa* and other non-timber forest products found in the *jiri*.

To gain access into the Norumedzo, traditional authorities (chiefs and headmen) and government institutions (such as District Administration Office and Rural District Council) and others involved in environmental management like conservation authorities (such as Environmental Management Agency [EMA]) facilitated my entry into the field site. These connections were also useful in providing me with some important information on how *harurwa* and the *jiri* have been ‘cultivated’ and conserved over the years. Besides, entering the field site with the consent and blessings of authorities who are custodians of culture and the environment was important in gaining confidence of my respondents, in obtaining dependable results, and also for my personal security as a researcher. Otherwise, in such a politically volatile environment as that of Zimbabwe, I would have run the risk of being mistaken as a spy by any of the political party members.

Since participant observation was the primary method for this study, I was resident in my field site – Norumedzo Communal Area of south-eastern Zimbabwe – for a period of about twelve-and-a-half months. I was aware that as an ethnographic method, participant observation requires the researcher to be flexible in responding to new ideas and methods should they become necessary. As one familiar with the Shona language (used by the Varumedzo), I was able to participate in most of their daily interactions, but, of course, not all of them. I also listened to stories, observed, kept a field diary of interactions/field notes, and photograph recordings of “naturally” occurring communicative interactions with the participants in a range of everyday life activities. Stories (though they might be fiction), for example, “succeed in giving us a vivid sense of what is at stake at any moment of being, and in introducing us to some of the ways in which existential-phenomenological thought has theorised the question of being” (Jackson 2005: xiii).

To facilitate access to community members and to ensure that data collection occurred from multiple perspectives, I recruited two key informants (interlocutors⁶), Tendai and James.

⁶ In this dissertation, the concepts, ‘informant’ and ‘interlocutor’ are used interchangeably to refer to research participants. However, the word ‘interlocutor’ is more preferred as in Zimbabwe especially during the liberation struggle, ‘informants’ were was a loaded term used to refer to traitors (*vatengesesi*) who collaborated with the colonial enemy (see Muzvidziwa 2004: 305). Besides, the concept ‘interlocutor’ better reflects the exchange of ideas,

Observations from multiple perspectives have merit in that they allow for patterns to be identified so that verification of data can be done before it is presented. James, having been born and grew up in the Norumedzo, assisted me with data collection, and provided additional observations and information on the social meanings and significance of some local practices. Tendai helped me in conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews and informal conversations. Interviews, discussions and observations focused on: local people's beliefs and perceptions, their symbolic significance of different daily practices, their views of culture, nature, environment, personhood, interactions with *harurwa* and other beings, and aspirations as individuals and as a people. I will discuss these in detail in the sections below on methodologies and later chapters. For the moment, I wish to focus on the bureaucratic government structures and traditional leadership in the Norumedzo Communal Area in order to provide a better understanding of the studied area in relation to the politically volatile context of Zimbabwe.

The governance or administrative context in Norumedzo

Zimbabwe's political system is a duality of customary (also known as traditional) and statutory (also known as modern) systems of government such that the old and current Constitution of Zimbabwe (of 2013) recognises the institution of Chieftaincy within its statutory democratic governance. In Norumedzo as in many other communal areas in Zimbabwe, there is, therefore, a dual leadership system namely 'traditional institutions' (also known as 'traditional leadership') and bureaucratic government authorities (modern government systems) that exist side by side. For this reason, by traditional institutions, I refer to the authorities that existed in pre-colonial and through colonial times which are, at the present time, responsible for governing the welfare of people and utilisation of natural resources in the countryside. For purposes of this study, these authorities shall also be referred to as traditional leadership. Elected government authorities were tasked at independence in 1980 to perform the same duties as those of traditional leadership structures. From the top to bottom levels, these included, Office of the President (OoP), Member of Parliament (MP), the Rural District Development Committee (RDDC), elected Ward Councillor (WC), the elected Ward Development Committee (WADCO) presided over by the WC, and the elected Village Development Committee (VIDCO) presided over by the VIDCO Chair in each village. These structures were formed at independence in 1980 when the new

collaborations, interactions and negotiations that normally take place between the ethnographer (or anthropologist) and research participants during research, and indeed the production of particular kinds of knowledge. No wonder Devisch (cited in Olukoshi and Nyamnjoh 2011:16) refers to the relationship between an anthropologist and interlocutor (research participant) as ideally one of "mutually enriching co-implication".

government created five land tenure systems in Zimbabwe namely communal areas (such as Norumedzo), resettlement areas, small-scale commercial farms, large-scale commercial farms, and state land comprising national parks and forest land (Maphosa 2002). This study focuses on a communal area which since independence has remained state land with its ownership vested in the President of the country, a system adopted from the colonial government by the government of Zimbabwe. Kruger (1992:64) aptly notes this when he says: “from the time of European conquest, chieftainship and other positions depended not only on inheritance laws but also on the government approval”. Yet we may still want to know how and why the bureaucratic government structures such as the VIDCOs and WADCOs were formed after independence in 1980 when in fact traditional leadership already existed in the rural areas.

In 1984 in Zimbabwe, the then Prime Minister (PM) issued a directive to decentralise the government system in an attempt to allow the communal areas’ populations to actively participate in development issues (see Maphosa 2002). This led to the formation of local government structures such as VIDCOs and WADCOs. VIDCO is the lowest level of government administration in rural areas consisting only of one village. Each VIDCO consists of a total of about 100 households and is presided over by an elected chairperson who proposes an action plan and forwards it to the WADCO chairperson. The WADCO chairperson ratifies and approves it to the next level, the WC, who in turn forwards it to RDDC, which according to the Rural District Council (RDC) Act of 1988 is under the jurisdiction of RDC. In terms of number of villages, a WADCO consists of six or more villages. With regard to natural resource management, the Communal Lands Act (CLA) of 1982 currently vests control over land in the President of the country, but devolves administration to RDC. The 1988 RDC Act (Revised edition of 1996) gives power to RDCs as an appropriate authority to control the utilisation and management of natural resources, including trees, conservation of natural resources, control of bush fires, grazing land and agriculture in communal areas (Clarke and Katerere 1994; Maphosa 2002). Also, the same Act empowered the Minister of Local Government (MLG) with the mandate to enact conservation and land-use planning by-laws for RDCs, which the latter can employ to override any customary claims (Hobane 1999).

The attempts to decentralise local government has, thus, been met with controversies and criticism from many scholars. Meinnzen-Dick and Pradhan (2002), for example, argue that the existence of parallel legal systems creates confusion and uncertainty for both local resource users and state-appointed functionaries, resulting in ‘forum shopping’, that is, selective use and application of rules and regulations that suit their particular needs and circumstances. Scoones and Matose (1993) also argue that RDCA accords all power to the state and limit that of the local

people – traditional leadership – to participate and exercise authority and control in the management of natural resources in their communities. This is seconded by the political analyst, John Makumbe (1998) who criticised the formation of VIDCOs and WADCOs in 1984 as being part of a process to disempower traditional authority and punish it for its role in collaborating with the colonial government. Some critics such as Hammar (2005) criticised VIDCOs and WADCOs for being used as the then ZANU (PF) ruling party committees instead of being committees to spearhead democracy and development in rural areas. Hammar (2005: 19) wrote “VIDCOs and WADCOs have remained local ZANU (PF) party committees and cells carried over from the liberation war but whose partisan and authoritarian practices pervaded both popular participation and democratic developmentalism”. Even the Rural District Councils (RDCs) have been criticised for failing to remain as autonomous units serving the interests of local communities as they in fact have “remained an appendage of central government, severely marginalised, under-resourced and dependent on central government for both their funding and staffing” (Muzondidya 2009: 178). As such, the RDC Act contradicts the ideals of full participation in development issues by local community members for which structures such as VIDCO and WADCO were created. This was in spite of, as Maphosa (2002: 6, emphasis mine) argues, the fact that: “Chiefs, sub-chiefs, headmen and kraal heads in effect constituted the communal land’s administrative and legal institutions with historically *and culturally* defined areas and sets of rules and regulations clearly understood by the rural people”.

Competing and overlapping jurisdiction between elected and traditional authorities rampant in Zimbabwe’s rural areas was chiefly a result of the state’s attempt to separate traditional leadership from the local bureaucratic government (Maphosa 2002). However, traditional leadership and bureaucracy are not mutually exclusive as they belong to the same state. While VIDCOs as well as WADCOs and chiefs and headmen each operate at their own level they are interdependent and their roles and activities often overlap, and sometimes conflict. In the Norumedzo Communal Area, the interdependence between bureaucratic government structures and the traditional leadership structures was observable during some VIDCO meetings chaired by the headmen and WADCO meetings chaired by the Councilor. I observed, for example, that some of the development issues that were discussed at village level by the headman and villagers were the same as those discussed at WADCO level. These included borehole maintenance, conservation of natural resources in the *jiri* and control of veld fires. It seems the realisation, by the Zimbabwean government of this overlap, together with ZANU (PF)’s need for rural people’s political support amid the threatening Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) resulted in the re-empowerment of the

traditional authority. The key step towards empowerment of traditional authority was the establishment of the 1998 Traditional Leaders Act (TLA) [Chapter 29: 17] which empowered traditional leaders to deal with problems of land, natural resources, crimes and disputes in the communal areas. The Traditional Leadership Act states that all chiefs in Zimbabwe are appointed by the President and are tasked to supervise headmen areas, promote and uphold cultural values, oversee collection of taxes by village heads (on behalf of the RDC), and ensure land and natural resources use and allocation in line with the national legislation (Mandondo 2000). In the Norumedzo area, the TLA was very much respected as I observed that all the headmen in the Norumedzo area reported to Chief Norumedzo. Both the chief and the headmen were responsible for fostering and ensuring that taxes were collected for the RDC and that natural resources were well conserved and fairly distributed.

Also, it is of utmost importance to note that although the chief is now appointed by the President, in contrast to the colonial and precolonial periods, a critical look at the chiefs' roles in post-independent Zimbabwe shows that it is indeed a restoration or return to the role of chiefs during the colonial period, as they were also tasked to supervise headmen, oversee collection of taxes (on behalf of the colonial government), and ensure proper management of natural resources such as land. The reinstitution of traditional leaders as Presidential appointees and their 'new duties' accorded entail a dual system of natural resource governance, as both bureaucratic government structures and traditional systems of leadership exist parallel to each other. In fact in terms of Communal Land Act of 1982, RDCs are the land authorities responsible for allocation of land within their areas of responsibility. However, this allocation of land by the RDCs is carried out within the confines and/or provisions of traditions and customs which are commonly accepted, and traditional leadership are the custodians of these. In the face of these two systems, ideally, environmental conservation and management at district level is the responsibility of the district councils through their Rural District Development Committees (RDDCs) comprised of elected leaders and technical officers from line ministries. The RDDC is empowered by the RDC through RDC Act of 1988 (revised 1996) to make by-laws and develop new ones in conjunction with local communities. At the local level, the village assembly or its headmen are in charge of the enforcement of all environmental management and conservation by-laws on behalf of the chief. It should, nevertheless, be highlighted that the parallel existence of traditional leadership and RDCs has always posed power struggles, and in many cases, a crisis in natural resource conservation and management in communal areas of Zimbabwe (see Makumbe 1998; Hammar 2005).

As already alluded to in the preceding sections, there is a dual leadership system in Norumedzo, namely, traditional leadership and elected government authorities. I observed that in practice the bureaucratic government structures are not supported by people, yet both systems of leadership are legislatively supported by the following statutes; revised edition of Rural District Councils (RDCs) of 1996, the Provincial Councils and Administration Act Number 12, the Traditional Leaders Act (TLA) Chapter 29: 17, Number 25 of 1998 and the Constitution of Zimbabwe (EISA Report 2007:79). All these statutes maintain that the head of the state appoints traditional leaders who have been selected at local levels according to customary laws and with the aid of local government, particularly the DA's office. In Table 1 below, I present the different leadership structures for both the bureaucratic government and traditional structures.

	Traditional Leadership Authorities	State/Government Leadership Authorities
National Level	President of Council of Chiefs	President and Cabinet
Provincial Level	Council of Chiefs	Provincial Administrator
District Level	Chiefs ⁷ (in Bikita district)	-Member of Parliament (MP) -District Administrator -Rural District Council Chair -Rural District Development Committee (for Bikita)
Norumedzo Ward	-Chief (<i>Vashe</i>) -Chief's Advisors (<i>Dare raVashe</i>) -Headman (<i>Sadunhu</i>) -Headman's Advisors (<i>Dare raSadunhu</i>)	-Councilor -WADCO -Ward Committee -Village Committee -VIDCO Chair -VIDCO

⁷ Chiefs in Bikita District include Mazungunye, Mukanganwi, Ziki, Budzi and Mabika of which though Norumedzo has a higher or at least equal status as his younger brother Mazungunye, due to political conflicts, Norumedzo was not appointed as a chief, but a sub-chief. Norumedzo's appointment as a chief was scheduled for July 2012, but it is alleged that the appointment was postponed to an unknown date for the reason that no specific date for the appointment was indicated on the letter written to that effect by the District Administrator to Council of Chiefs and Minister of Local Government.

	Village Head (<i>Sabhuku</i>) -Village Head's Advisors (<i>Dare raSabhuku</i>) -Homestead Head (<i>Samusha</i>)	
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Table 1: *Leadership structures for both the bureaucratic government and traditional structures*

In terms of customary laws, the family lineage of the chief, sub-chiefs, and headmen know potential heirs to be installed in the event of death of any of the above mentioned traditional leaders. Stressing this point, Holleman (1952: 21) had this to say of the Shona people of southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe):

Succession to the chieftainship is governed by the common principles of collateral succession ... According to these principles the eldest son, regardless of the position or rank of his mother, succeeds to the personal name and position of his father. When he dies his next youngest brother or half-brother succeeds to the father's name, until the generation of sons of the father is exhausted and the eldest grandson succeeds to the name and position of his grandfather, the determining factor again being the order of birth amongst collateral grandsons.

This does not mean to say that appointment of traditional leadership is always transparent and perfectly follows the common principles of collateral succession. Sometimes chieftainship succession conflicts arise depending on the circumstances surrounding the death of the chief to be replaced or other such factors (see also VijFhuizen 1997; VijFhuizen and Makora 1998; Holleman 1952). Holleman (1952) gives examples of the Vahera people of Southern Save and the Rozvi of Hwedza, Zimbabwe, where conflicts arose between genealogical seniority and political superiority. The conflicts are said to have resulted from situations when one's brother died and the younger brother (to the deceased) succeeded to the name of their common forefather as a chief. A similar case in point is the chieftainship succession conflict of the Varumedzo in recent years, which I discuss in detail in chapter four of this dissertation. As narrated by [acting] Chief Norumedzo:

The contestations for the Norumedzo chieftainship resulted in a 15 year conflict between members of the royal family. The conflict started in 1993 when after the mysterious death of my father (the then Chief Norumedzo) Mr Furanai Chikwariro contested chieftainship. It only ended in 2008 with the intervention of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) who, after approached by some concerned Norumedzo community members, ruled that I

should provisionally rule up until the time the new chief will be officially appointed by the local government
(Interview with Chief Norumedzo, May 2012).

However, where there are no chieftainship contestations, after the death of a chief the royal family deliberates on the new chief before they forward the name to the district and provincial authorities for approval and later appointment by the head of state. Traditional leadership, thus, follows a hierarchy. It starts with the individual in the village; the household head (*Samusha*) who is normally a father or a mother where a father is absent; the village headman (*Sabbuku*); the sub-chief (*Sadunbu*); DA; the Council of Chiefs (*Dare remadzishé*); and the Office of the President.

Having discussed government structures and traditional leadership in Norumedzo, the ensuing sections focus on methodological issues of the study, that is, the methodologies that were employed during study.

Ethnographic and methodological approaches

The primary approach used to carry out this study was ethnographic fieldwork. The ethnographic fieldwork for this study was undertaken in the Norumedzo Area for twelve and half months from December 2011 to December 2012. Strictly speaking, ethnography is not just a simple account of a people, society or culture, but is framed by a point of view which includes and excludes data in terms of their relevance to that point of view (Jacobson 1991: 8). Ethnographic research is an emergent process involving dialogue between the ethnographer and the people in the research setting (Myers 1999) where fieldwork is conducted. Fieldwork “stresses the continuous presence of a researcher in the field” (Gobo 2008: 11) so as to allow the ethnographer to get firsthand, intensive, systematic exploration of a culture and participate in the culture and social life of the research subjects, hence critical ethnographic fieldwork. As Nanda and Warms (2007: 60) stress, “fieldwork includes many techniques, such as structured and unstructured interviewing, mapping space, taking census data, photographing and filming, using historical archives, recording life histories and participant observation”. I had in mind the idea that:

Good fieldwork and ethnography are based both on the fieldworker’s ability to see things from the studied person’s point of view (the emic perspective) and on the ability to see patterns, relationships, and meanings that may not be consciously understood by a person in that culture (the etic perspective) (Nanda and Warms, 2007: 60).

Based on this understanding, one of my research assistants and I were accommodated at a local High School in headman Chiwa's village situated almost at the center of the Norumedzo Communal Area. My other research assistant lived in the villages near the *jiri*. Living at the school enabled us to dialogue with social actors of varying age groups such as young people in the area (for example students) and their parents around the villages during the day and to return to the school for recharging our computer and camera batteries and to update my fieldwork notes at night. Staying at the school also afforded me the opportunity to participate in the local people's everyday activities, meetings and ceremonies. I took part in many of the Norumedzo people's activities including *harumwa* harvesting, funerals, church gatherings, and VIDCO and WADCO meetings. Given the ethnographic approach adopted in my study, I remained mindful of not imposing my worldviews over my research subjects through controlling discursive practices and communicative repertoires. I achieved this by maintaining a low profile (for my research subjects to see me not as a researcher, but one of them) and listening to all the stories of my research subjects. Simon and Dippo (1986: 201) warn critical ethnographers of the need for reflexivity when they say: "We should turn to a consideration of how the discourse we use to talk with others and through which we write and think, silences as well as articulates [...] At times we have a tendency to universalise our discourse, forgetting its regulatory impact". Reflexivity is the conscious self-examination of the ethnographer's interpretive presuppositions or the conscious reflection on the interpretive nature of fieldwork, the construction of ethnographic authority, the interdependence of ethnographer and informants and the involvement of the ethnographer's self in fieldwork (Robben and Sluka 2012: 514). In view of Simon and Dippo's warning above and Robben and Sluka's definition, I applied reflexivity at three different levels. Firstly, in revisiting and rethinking my research assumptions and theoretical lenses, as the research progressed for accuracy and authenticity. Secondly, during data collection, to critically assess my observations and participants' worldviews in light of other possible variations that could explicate their responses. I also applied reflexivity in analysis of my data by allowing other researchers to review and validate my data analysis.

The three different levels of reflexivity applied were drawn on critical theoretical and practical ethnographic methods of investigation. This methodological blend was used in view of Fetterman's (1989) observation that understanding why members of a given group of research subjects do what they do and accurately describing their situations and behaviour relies on developing an ability to understand things from the perspective of the research subjects. The choice of my research methods was, thus, informed by and drew on the strengths of blending theory and practice such as intersubjectivity, that is, interpretation of the research participants'

worldviews based on their own experiences and in support of them with the researcher's own interpretation. Though fieldwork is a highly complex arena, for scholars like Fetterman (1989) the blending of theory and practice helps to reduce biases, foster authenticity in light of competing views/experiences, and to more easily identify shifts in patterns of data collected. Based on this methodological stance, my research process involved multiple data collection methods namely, fieldwork, direct observation of networks and interactions in the Norumedzo and the *jiri* therein, interviews, focus group discussions, life histories of Norumedzo residents, informal discussions, photographs and documentary research. These multiple methods allowed me to use critical investigative and analytical perspectives, while being mindful of the need to analyse and interpret discourses as well as my participants' feelings and emotions to develop and achieve "thick description" (Geertz 1983:6) of the networks and critical accounts of relations between edible stinkbugs – *harurwa* –, people, forests, ecosystems and the state from the standpoint of those who experience it. As such, using a critical ethnographic approach was important for my study as it allowed me to gain different perspectives on the networks, processes, relations, interactions and contexts within which the local people –Varumedzo – strive to sustain their livelihoods while managing and conserving the *jiri*.

I should point out that when I sought to find out people's perceptions of personhood and origins of *harurwa* and how these influence conservation practices in Norumedzo, I observed that people chose events and notions that they wished to convey to me. Similarly, as shall be seen in chapter 3, I have chosen what I consider important to convey in presenting the narrative reconstructions around the issue of personhood and *harurwa* I collected during fieldwork. In showing multiple voices as well as partial connections, complexities, and communal resource management in Norumedzo I, attempt to incorporate multiple versions of personhood and stories about *harurwa* origins in the Norumedzo.

Selection of site and participants

In selecting the study site and respondents, different selection techniques were employed. In Zimbabwe, the Norumedzo Forest is one of the forests where conservation is done through community or local practices and mutual coexistence of humans and other beings. The Norumedzo site was therefore not accidentally selected, but selection was done purposively through various criteria, namely that:

- The site had to be a rural community where communities' active participation are the drivers of conservation of the natural environment. Some potential sites such as Mukanganwi Communal Area (also in Bikita) had already failed to make their conservation system viable due to various reasons, principle of which was the long absence of the incumbent Chief, Kumbirai Gumokumo Mukanganwi, who culturally should enforce traditional daily/local practices and conservation strategies of the natural environment in the area.

- Researchability: I would be able to gain access to the research site and to obtain permission from local government and traditional authorities to carry out a research over one to one and half years.

- Operationality: The *jiri* (Norumedzo Forest) had to have been operational for at least five years so that I will be well positioned to explore and easily examine the effectiveness and perceived benefits and impacts of the conservation strategies and practices used in the *jiri* to the local people's lives.

- Originality: The research site(s) were to be one where no social or anthropological research of the same nature had been carried out before or were currently being carried out.

A serious consideration of the potential sites in the country in light of the above criteria made me confident that Norumedzo was the best site to carry out my ethnographic research as it met all of the aforementioned criteria. The study population in the Norumedzo Area (ward 15) was 22 160 including all age groups and gender (cf. Bikita Rural District Memorandum of April 2010) that participated in the conservation of the Norumedzo Forest and depended on *harurwa* (directly or otherwise) for their livelihood. All the 56 (44 registered and 12 unregistered) villages in the Norumedzo Communal Area participated directly or otherwise in the conservation of the *jiri* and depended on *harurwa* and/or other non-timber products found in the *jiri*.

While Norumedzo Community does not depend solely on *harurwa* for their livelihood, for purposes of collecting detailed information on my area of study, I narrowed my research focus to include just the 44 registered villages and 12 unregistered villages under the jurisdiction of Chief Norumedzo, as well as *harurwa* traders in different selling points as the main case studies for my study. I employed simple random sampling to select the key respondents for the study. The simple random sampling was employed by way of snowball sampling to identify key respondents from the case studies. A snowball sampling technique is whereby "each person interviewed *or contacted* leads the researcher to the next person(s) based on a designated set of criteria" (Bernard 1998: 705, emphasis mine). Weekly visits were made to my primary

respondents, that is, the key participants and other actors such as the *jiri*. Primary respondents in the case studies who provided me with useful information concerning my study included: household heads, headmen, sub-chiefs, chief, local administrators, *harurwa* administrators, *harurwa* policemen, *harurwa* dealers and children, who were either male or female, and villagers of Norumedzo communal area or elsewhere.

Multispecies ethnography

Multispecies ethnography is a new genre of writing and mode of research that has arrived on the anthropological stage. It puts creatures such as animals, plants and insects, which previously appeared on the margins of Anthropology – as part of the landscape, as food for humans, as symbols – into the foreground of anthropological studies to appear alongside humans (see Raikhel 2010; cf. Agamben 1998; Tsing 2008; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010). Multispecies ethnography, thus, studies a host of organisms whose lives and deaths are linked to human social worlds. The approach centres on how a multitude of organisms' livelihoods shape and are shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces. This is aptly captured by Kirksey and Helmreich:

Anthropologists have been committed, at least since Franz Boas, to investigating relationships between nature and culture. At the dawn of the 21st century, this enduring interest was inflected with some new twists. An emergent cohort of “multispecies ethnographers” began to place a fresh emphasis on the subjectivity and agency of organisms whose lives are entangled with humans. Multispecies ethnography emerged at the intersection of three interdisciplinary strands of inquiry: environmental studies, science and technology studies (STS), and animal studies. Departing from classically ethno-biological subjects, useful plants and charismatic animals, multispecies ethnographers also brought understudied organisms – such as insects, fungi, and microbes – into anthropological conversations (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010: 545).

Kirksey and Helmreich (2010), also quote Eduardo Kohn in an interview who elaborates on the goal of multispecies ethnography: “The goal in multi-species ethnography should not just be to give voice, agency or subjectivity to the nonhuman – to recognise them as others, visible in their difference – but to force us to radically rethink these categories of our analysis as they pertain to all beings”. Haraway's (2008: 244) *When Species Meet* provides one key starting point for the “species turn” in Anthropology as she writes: “If we appreciate the foolishness of human exceptionalism then we know that becoming is always becoming with – in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake”. This means the need to acknowledge the

presence of other beings in the field is critical when one is carrying out ethnographic fieldwork. Mindful of this realisation, multispecies ethnography as a method allowed me to study “interspecies relationships” (cf. Haraway 1989; 2008). That is, the social relationships, networks and interconnections between humans and other beings in the Norumedzo area such as insects and plants (among others).

In this study, multispecies ethnography was supplemented by multi-sited ethnography. Multi-sited ethnography is a method of data collection that follows a topic or social problem through different field sites geographically or socially (see Marcus 1995; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010), that is, in terms of interconnections and relationships. It is worth noting that while many methods can be used on their own, multi-sited ethnography normally requires use of additional methods such as structured interviews and surveys (including many other methods of data collection). As George Marcus (1995; 2011) proposes, multi-sited ethnography is ushered in as a way to examine global processes and the increasing interconnectedness and relationships of people through the process of globalisation, as it solves the need for a method to analytically explore transnational processes, groups of people in motion, and ideas that extend over multiple locations. As highlighted above, when conducting multi-sited ethnography, spaces can be geographic, social, or virtual, and the type of spaces ultimately depends on what the researcher chooses to follow. Besides, multi-sited ethnography emphasises interconnectedness more than multiple sites (see Robben and Sluka 2012: 368). In this study, multi-sited ethnography was used to trace movements and connectedness of *harurwa* dealers and the different spaces they were found such as the *jiri* and *harurwa* selling points in Masvingo province. As such, a multi-sited method was used to challenge “the habit inherited from Malinowskian ethnography of assuming that subjects can be found in one place or in ‘natural’ units of difference such as cultures *and communities*” (Coleman and von Hellermann 2011: 3, emphasis original). I realised that *harurwa* dealers, key informants and *harurwa* themselves were not always found in-situ, but sometimes in many different spaces which demanded that I follow them. I had to move from one space to another to research with them and obtain all the data I needed. Marcus (2011: 19, emphasis original) captures this neatly when he says:

The habit or impulse of multi-sited ethnography is to see the subjects as differently constituted, as not products of essential units of difference only, but to see them in development – displaced, recombined, hybrid ... beyond particular situations of ethnography towards the system of relations *and interactions* which define them and perceive them as intellectual partners/counterparts of ethnographers rather than others.

Multi-sited ethnography, thus, enables researchers to study multiple sites and movement, and has the merit of being fluid as they [multiple sites] acknowledge movements of “things” over time as they traverse theoretically, temporally, and spatially relevant boundaries (see Clifford 1997). A multi-sited approach, thus, traces relations and associations that begin with the assemblage, but also encourages us to account for what is not yet in the assemblage.

Given that an ethnographic approach requires a researcher to stay in the field for quite some time, participating in most if not all activities of the people being studied, I resided in the Norumedzo Communal Area and involved myself in participant and non-participant observation of life and activities of local villagers. During this time, I was able to conduct interviews, informal discussions and make observations with different respondents. The deployment of these methods gave me the opportunity to achieve my research objectives and to explore my research questions around issues of politics, history and context more reflectively with regard to contributions of the Norumedzo Forest and *harurwa* to conservation of the *jiri* and sustenance of local livelihoods.

Specific research methods

In the ensuing paragraphs, I describe in some detail the various research methods I employed in collecting important data for my research. Each method had its own strengths in the context it was used. Informal discussions, in-depth interviews as well as participant observation, for instance enabled me to “uncover unintended and intended consequences” (Barbour 2008: 13) of daily practices, beliefs, economic flows of *harurwa* and forestry conservation in Norumedzo. Also, some important data about conflict resolving, adultery cases, and damage of trees in the *jiri* were unravelled, resulting in my altering some of my initial research questions.

Transact walks

During the first week of my fieldwork, my research assistants (Tendai and James) and I did a participatory walking tour right round the communal area as a whole including the *jiri*. A participatory transect walk “involves systematically walking through an area, with key informants, observing and asking for explanations of everything” (Bernard 1994: 140) encountered along the way. As already alluded to, the objectives of the walking tour were threefold: To allow us to make initial observations; for us to get familiarise with the *jiri* and the general physical landscape

of Norumedzo Communal Area; and to enable us to be familiar with villages and people in Norumedzo Communal Area.

During the research period in the Norumedzo Communal Area, my research assistants and I were involved in data recording. We took fieldwork notes on what we observed, experienced and heard about on issues around *harurwa* and the conservation of the *jiri*. Since field notes were normally taken down during the day, at night I reflected on all the field notes, and compared them before typing in my computer. I also kept a journal in which I wrote whatever question or issue I thought required reflection and follow-up. This was important in rethinking issues, reframing my primary research questions and reconstructing experiences and observations occurring on a daily basis.

Participant observation

Taking into cognizance that the primary method for this study was ethnography, daily observations of all important activities, events, behaviours and interactions were made throughout the period of my fieldwork in Norumedzo Communal Area. It should be underscored that participant observation was indeed at the heart of my fieldwork. During the *harurwa* season, I could wake up early in the morning while dew still clung to the grass and small shrubs that characterise the area in winter. From around 6 o'clock in the morning, I would start walking around in some parts of the *jiri* – the habitats of *harurwa* – together with *harurwa* harvesters, *harurwa* policemen, and the administrators so as to understand the different life worlds of *harurwa* and that of the *jiri* in general.

Participant observation, thus, was appropriate for a study such as this because it allowed me to get close to the activities and everyday experiences (Emerson et al 1995: 1) of my research subjects (the Norumedzo people) such that I deeply immersed myself in their worlds and began to understand things from their own perspectives. Participant-observation “is the technique of gathering data on human cultures by living among the people, observing their social interaction on an ongoing daily basis, and participating as much as possible in their lives” (Nanda and Warms 2007: 60). This was mainly in order “to develop the intimate familiarity and sensitivity to the social world” (Brooks 1989: 235) of the Norumedzo people of south-eastern Zimbabwe. See picture below (figure 6) of people harvesting *harurwa* in the *jiri*.



Figure 2: People, including myself, harvesting harurwa in the *jiri* using a gokowonho (harurwa harvesting stick).

As highlighted in sections above, to ensure that I could be accepted by the local Norumedzo people and that I become a participant observer of local village life, I lived with the studied people based at a local High School, Machirara, where I also sometimes voluntarily helped teaching one Advanced level class. Though I was much concerned with issues related to *harurwa* and conservation in the Norumedzo Forest, I knew that “only by living with people (*in this case, the Norumedzo people*) and engaging in their activities over a long period of time can we see a holistic perspective of a culture – seeing culture as a system of interrelated patterns” (Nanda and Warm, 2007: 60, emphasis mine). As such, I became more reflective in my observations of issues to do with local politics, history, and context (Lee, 1992) as these easily impact, directly or otherwise, on *harurwa* networks and conservation of the *jiri*.

In order to familiarise myself with the local people, create relationships and networks with my respondents, and to have a general sense of issues pertaining to *harurwa* and conservation in the *jiri*, I spent the first three months (from December 2011 to February 2012) making observations and asking questions that would clearly set my research agenda. This move bolstered the mutual trust between the local Norumedzo people, my research assistants and me. It also afforded me the opportunity to observe people, situations and the general physical

landscape in their natural settings. It is during these initial stages of my fieldwork that I came to realise that observation is a powerful research tool as it enabled me to gather data about many activities in relation to my study. In fact, by observing live situations, my research assistants and I did not only rely on hearsay. Neither did we only rely on what we heard about people's perceptions concerning issues to do with *harurwa* and conservation in the *jiri*, but could witness various events, activities and interactions in Norumedzo Communal Area in and around the *jiri*.

Yet, while participant observation as a method had the merits elaborated above, it also had its own problems. As noted by Mwanje (2001), participant observation may sometimes be seen as intrusive in other people's affairs, as sometimes a researcher gains access to private information that a respondent could not have reported had it been a different method employed. This observation by Mwanje was germane to my research as during some of our visits to the locals' homesteads we noticed that though allowed in, we were intruding into their private family affairs. I can still recall one of the visits one of my assistants, James and I paid to one of our key informants. It is only after we were allowed entrance that we realised there was a serious misunderstanding between the mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law. The mother-in-law greeted us but with tears running down her cheeks. Though the mother-in-law seemingly felt comfortable to narrate to us what was transpiring between herself and her daughter-in-law, we felt very uneasy and wished that we had not arrived at that particular moment; hence problems associated with participant observation.

Interviews

To supplement data collected through participant observation, I used unstructured interviews. As noted by Nanda and Warms (2007: 66), "unstructured, open-ended interviews explore a particular topic in depth". The interviews were meant to obtain perceived impacts of the *jiri* and *harurwa* on the locals' lives. Unstructured interviews were considered the most appropriate method for gaining the locals' perceptions, as they naturally yield useful data where informants are difficult to directly observe, for example, when studying people like chiefs. They also enable me to get historical data about the issues being researched. The interviews were mainly used for issues relating to perceived benefits of *harurwa* to locals' livelihood, contribution of daily practices to conservation of the *jiri*, gender relations and politics around the Norumedzo forest conservation. During the interviews, young and old people of both sexes and all societal classes including children, headmen, sub-chiefs, chief, school teachers, and household heads were asked to talk freely about their perceptions, life histories and impacts of *harurwa* and the *jiri* on their lives and livelihood activities.

Besides unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews were used to identify and document livelihood strategies and resource utilisation by different households in the Norumedzo Communal Area. Semi-structured interviews have the major advantage that open-ended questions can also be included, thereby allowing room for further probing and revealing unintended but useful information. To this effect, data on economic flows, gender relations and livelihood strategies were collected.

During my fieldwork, a total of ten focus group discussions were conducted with my respondents, three of which were conducted in the *jiri* with *harurwa* policemen on late mornings when the policemen were freer to avoid disruption of their guarding activities. Each focus group discussion lasted for about one and half hours. Focus group discussions are “informal interviews with small groups zeroing on specific topics or subjects” (Mwanje 2001: 34). While Mwanje’s definition gives us clear insights into what focus group discussions are, it leaves out some important details. I, therefore, add to Mwanje’s definition that focus group discussions are informal interviews with small groups of people focusing on specific topics with the objective to gain a deeper understanding of the group’s experiences, sensibilities, activities and beliefs. In this regard, the focus group discussions were conducted with respondents drawn randomly from all the 56 villages in Norumedzo mainly to understand in greater detail the policemen’s experiences and activities in the *jiri*, gender relations in *jiri* conservation and, how their being *harurwa* policemen influenced their relations with locals in the Norumedzo Communal Area. Most of the focus group discussions conducted generated excitement and interest among my respondents. I could observe that most of them were happy to be given an opportunity to discuss openly issues to do with gender relations, local level politics, development and conservation in their area, as these were all issues that directly affect them. It is worth noting that some of the groups enjoyed the discussions so much that they asked for extension to two hour discussions. Below (Table 2), I present a detailed summary of focus group discussions held during fieldwork.

Number of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	Topical Issues Discussed	Respondents Details
Two	Conservation strategies used in the <i>jiri</i> , <i>jiri</i> activities during	Mixed men and women - Group 1 (Chief Norumedzo,

	<i>harurwa</i> season and when <i>harurwa</i> are out of season and, perceived contribution and impacts of <i>harurwa</i> on the locals' livelihoods.	four men and 3 women) -Group 2 (4 women and 3 men)
Three	Gender relations in the <i>jiri</i> , conservation and guarding strategies deployed safeguarding the <i>jiri</i> during <i>harurwa</i> season, gender and age group participate in the <i>harurwa</i> harvesting and issues to do with the <i>Musasa</i> .	-Group 1 (5 women catching <i>harurwa</i> in the <i>jiri</i>) -Group 2 (4 <i>harurwa</i> administrators and 3 <i>harurwa</i> policemen) -Group 3 (5 <i>harurwa</i> policemen)
Two	Economic impacts of <i>harurwa</i> on human livelihoods, <i>harurwa</i> selling points and, perceptions of potential <i>harurwa</i> buyers in the market	-Group 1 (3 women and 3 young men in their teens who are all <i>harurwa</i> dealers) -Group 2 (3men and two women)
Two	Social networks, relations and interaction between humans and non-humans in the <i>jiri</i> , perceptions on the successes and failures of management and conservation strategies used in the <i>jiri</i> and, power relations in the Norumedzo communal area	-Group 1 (3 men and 3 women) -Group 2 (4 <i>harurwa</i> policemen and 2 <i>harurwa</i> administrators)
One	Challenges faced by Norumedzo people during time when <i>harurwa</i> are out of season and, perceptions on	-3 men and 4 women

	methods used in harvesting <i>harurwa</i> in the <i>jiri</i> .	
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Table 2: Detailed summary of all the FGDs held in Norumedzo Communal Area during fieldwork

Throughout my fieldwork, I generated data for life histories of my primary respondents through informal discussions and in-depth interviews I held with them. In order to select life histories from my key informants, I started by making informal discussions with them before interviewing them to clarify and elaborate on some of the issues they had raised during our informal discussions. The interviews with key respondent lasted for about two hours. I found the exercise of collecting data about life histories of my key respondents thought provoking and very interesting as some of the respondents such as Chief Norumedzo were as old as 96 (in 2012) according to his birth certificate. Working with people of such age suggested to me that I was going to gather very rich stories about *harurwa* and conservation practices used in the *jiri*.

Besides, the exercise of collecting data helped to create good rapport with my respondents resulting in many other local people being keen to participate in some of my research activities. Data on life histories thus was important in two main ways: In generating socio-economic, political and historical information about the *jiri* and *harurwa*; and in generating a good rapport with my respondents in the field.

The other method I used during my fieldwork to collect important data was informal discussions. Informal discussion, being a constituent of participant observation, afforded me the opportunity to gain access to valuable sources of data about current activities, personal experiences, individual perceptions and even sensitive issues on politics at both local and national levels. With time, respondents were increasingly comfortable discussing both sensitive and insensitive issues in my presence. Informal discussions took place naturally when the local people spoke freely about different issues about their experiences, perceptions and current activities. The informal discussions were important in various ways, including keeping me updated on meetings, current activities, religious gatherings and traditional ceremonies in the Norumedzo Communal Area. As a researcher who was also doing volunteering work, teaching of one of the Advanced level classes at a local High School, Machirara, all age groups became more open to me as they felt I was part of them. Staying at a neutrally independent institution such as a school (Machirara High School), located at the center of my study area, was strategic in facilitating my collection of data and interaction with all members of the Norumedzo Community.

Photographing

During the course of my research, I also used a camera to record images of social activities and general aspects of the fieldwork site landscape. This way, photographs were used as a methodological tool to gather and generate important additional data that cannot readily be captured by other methods such as informal discussions among others. For example, describing *musasa* as a place where *harurwa* administrators and *harurwa* policemen stay during *harurwa* season would not have presented a vivid picture of the *musasa*. The same applies to describing activities of people catching *harurwa* in the *jiri* as people would hardly get sense of how people behave when harvesting the insects. As Kartoglu (2006) rightly points out, such additional data include physical environments, conservations, non-verbal cues, and both verbal and non-verbal interviewer behaviours and interactions. To this effect, I photographed the *musasa*, *jiri*, people harvesting *harurwa* and other *jiri* activities. The recordings were important not only in generating additional data, but in confirming data gathered through observations, interviews and informal discussions.

Also, photographs were used as a way to help me identify issues that needed further reflection and exploration. On the part of my interlocutors, photographs helped stimulating interest and excitement from all interlocutors involved. This was in agreement with Penn-Edwards' (2004) observation that recordings such as photographs lead to stimulated recall and possibly generate more interest among the respondents.

Reviewing documents

Besides the ethnographic approach and related methods, explained above, I also relied on documentary data relevant to my study. The documentary data were mainly collected from Local District Council (LDC), Environmental Management Agency (EMA) and the District Administration Office (DAO). The information collected mainly provided background to the Norumedzo Forest and natural resources therein such as *harurwa*, wild fruits and others. The limitation in using documentary research was that besides limited data on Norumedzo *Jiri*, the documents pertaining to the detailed history, background and impact of *harurwa* on livelihoods of people in south-eastern Zimbabwe were unavailable at LDC, EMA, DAO and elsewhere. This limitation was mainly a result that prior to my research, no other social or anthropological research was carried out, especially in relation to *harurwa* and their perceived impact on the locals' livelihood and conservation of the *jiri*.

Data analysis

To analyse data collected from the field, I drew from the analytical approach of “social interaction analysis” (Kendon 1990) and discourse analysis (Fairclough 1989) of all forms of relations between the locals, state, *harurwa* and the “natural” environment in general. This was motivated by the understanding that data collected consisted of recordings of natural communicative interactions that demonstrate the rural communities’ life histories, underlying beliefs, networks, relations with *harurwa*, and interactions with their “natural” environment on daily basis. Thus, after completion of my fieldwork, I went through all the field notes and developed codes which I used to trace the captured data for easy analysis. This was facilitated by the use of Thematic Content Analysis (TCA), which offers “a descriptive presentation of qualitative data obtained from interview transcripts collected from research participants or other identified texts that reflect experientially on the topic of study” (Anderson 2007:1). Also, to authenticate my analysis, I consulted peer reviewers with expertise and periodically revisited the field site to consult with participants and informants to gain consensus on the analysis of data.

Justification

Due to the surging significance of some forest insects to human existence, and in particular *harurwa*, research on insects continues to occupy a central stage in academic circles, with academics and researchers tussling with various aspects of the subject. However, I understood this to be the first anthropological study done on *harurwa* (edible stinkbug/*Encosternum delegorguei* Spinola). This is not to claim that no studies have been carried so far in Zimbabwe on edible insects, as I am aware of studies on mopane worms (*mathimbi/madora*) carried out by Chavunduka (1975), Madzudzo (2002) and Silow (1976) in Zimbabwe and Zambia. Curthbertson (1934), Mujele (1934), Maredza (1985), Makuku (1993a, 1993b), Teffo (2006) and Dzerefos (2009) have also researched *harurwa* in southern Africa but none of them have approached the subject from an anthropological perspective; hence the difference of the current study. In the case of the Norumedzo Communal Area where *harurwa* are an abundant resource, for example, it was confirmed during fieldwork that no other researcher had come into the area before to carry out anthropological research on *harurwa* and the *jiri*. As one respondent – a village elder in the Norumedzo – said: “*Ndimi maita munhu wokutanga kuzouya kugaririra muno umu kwenguva yakareba kundai muchiita tsvagurudzo yebururwa. Kubva tichikura batina munhu wakambonywa kuzogara munhu achiita tsvagurudzo yakadai seyenyu*”/You are the first person to come and reside in this area for this

prolonged period researching on *harurwa*. Since I grew up I haven't seen anyone coming to this area carrying out research as yours". This is in spite of the fact that *harurwa* are a well known resource and/or source of livelihood for the people in south-eastern Zimbabwe.

As a discipline, anthropology has over the years focused on the study of humankind, cultures and their development. In view of this, this study challenges anthropology as a discipline in that it unseats the general anthropological approach that for a long time now has always rested on the binaries of nature and culture, subject and object, science and indigenous epistemologies. The study acknowledges recent studies by leading anthropologists such as Donna Haraway (1997, 2007), Hugh Raffles (2010), and John Law (2010), among others who have called for a shift in anthropological discourse to include the study of relations between animals (insects included) and humans by anthropologists. While there is still patchy literature on the relationships of humans, forests and insects, Raffles' *Insectopedia* (2010) is a model of the kind of research a project such as this might pursue in some way. He argues for the need to seriously consider the relationships between human beings and other beings such as insects. In the case of *harurwa*, most of the literature focuses on the scientific description of *harurwa*, their economic, nutritional and medicinal values. As such, this project aims to rethink the ways in which the relationships of insects and people have been represented and, consequently, to address the absence of thought about insects in a great deal of conservation policy. For instance, many research studies on forest insects have offered a detailed scientific description of the science of *harurwa* (Magnien 2007; Picker et al 2004; Schuh and Slater 1995; Ho and Chen 2010; Teffo 2006; Imms et al 1977). These have classified *harurwa* in a family of large stinkbugs known as tessaratomidae. *Harurwa* is one of ten species of tessaratomidae (inflated stinkbugs) in southern Africa (Picker et al 2004).

As highlighted above, other researchers have emphasised the medicinal properties of *harurwa* and the indigenous trees and shrubs they feed on (Shackleton 1993; Anthony and Belinger 2007; Dzerefos et al 2009). They have pointed out that *harurwa* are "used to help cure hangovers when eaten raw" (Dzerefos 2005: 12). They are also believed to treat cold/influenza (Chidavaenzi 2010). The latter belief is commonly held by people in the Norumedzo Community. I recall one of the senior residents in the Norumedzo telling me that "*harurwa* are an important resource to us we sell them to get money. Besides, they are a cure for influenza, and for those who drink *harurwa* is an excellent medicine for hangover".

With regard to nutritional values, *harurwa* like other insects such as termites, grasshoppers and caterpillars contain reasonable levels of protein, important amino acids, vitamins and

minerals (Ramos-Elorduy et al 1997; Teffo et al 2007; Dzerefos 2009). As revealed by Teffo (2006), *harurwa* has a protein content of 35.5 %, fat content of 50.6%, carbohydrate content of 7.63 g/100g, energy value of 2599KJ/100g. *Harurwa* also has vitamin A, B, B1, B2, and E pegged at the concentrations of 0.23; 0.63; 0.86; and 2.17mg/100g respectively. In Zimbabwe and South Africa, *harurwa* are regarded as a traditional delicacy “with higher protein content, on a mass basis, than other animal and plant foods such as beef, chicken, fish, soya beans, and maize” (Teffo et al 2007). *Harurwa* are, in fact comparable with the insect, *Acantocephala declivis*, which has a protein content of 35% and 45% fat (Ramos-Elorduy et al 1997). During fieldwork, I observed that the defensive liquid, *fuve*/allomones, produced by *harurwa* is highly flammable and fatty. One morning after a catch in the *jiri*, my research assistant, James Mugumisi and I sought to prepare our *harurwa* at James’ home. It was during my early days in the Norumedzo Community and I wanted James to teach me how to prepared *harurwa*. On our arrival at James’s home, he gathered some firewood and made a fire. He warmed some water on the fire before he put the water in the dish where our *harurwa* were contained. “The water should be luke-warm for if you boil it, all the *harurwa* will be killed before they release the *fuve* (allomones). The *harurwa* with allomones will be brownish at their thorax and are sour though these are used as medicine for hangover and influenza”. I was very observant and attentive as James prepared the *harurwa*. After adding the warm water to the *harurwa*, I saw the water turning golden oily. I wanted to make sure if it was true that the allomone is highly inflammable as had been revealed during interviews with my respondents. I asked James to scratch a match stick and put it on top of the oily water. I was amazed to see a big flame going up. See picture below (figure 3) showing myself and others preparing (inside the *musasa*) *harurwa* after a catch in the *jiri*.



Figure 3: Harurwa policemen and myself preparing harurwa inside the musasa

On the economic significance of the insects, it has been reported that *harurwa* are sold and consumed as human food in Zimbabwe and South Africa (Maredza 1985; Makuku 1993a, 1993b; Teffo 2006; Teffo et al. 2007; Dzerefos et al 2009; Dzerefos and Rider 2010; Chidavaenzi 2010). In Zimbabwe, *harurwa* is also exported to neighbouring countries like Mozambique, South Africa and Botswana. Preliminary investigations indicate that market demand in South Africa exceeds the supply and harvesters travel 200km to areas around the Modjadji Nature Reserve to harvest the insects (Dzerefos 2005; Teffo et al 2007). This observation is germane to my study in Norumedzo, as I observed that the demand for *harurwa* in Zimbabwe was very high with people coming from all over the country and the region to buy *harurwa*. I will discuss this in greater detail in chapter 5 where I am going to look at the participation of *harurwa* in economic networks locally and in the region.

It is of interest to note that although literature on forest insects' economic, medicinal and nutritional values, and scientific description have been provided over the years, little is known and documented especially about *harurwa*'s life cycle, contribution to regional economy, history of existence, contribution to culture sustenance and forest conservation. There is a dearth of literature on the positive interrelations between forest insects, in particular *harurwa* and the economy, humans and other beings in Zimbabwe. In fact it is confirmed that *harurwa* is one of

the less researched families of the *pentatomoids* (Scholtz and Holm 1986; Schaefer et al 2000). Yet I observed that those who live in areas where insects such as *harurwa* exist view the insects as participants (as is explained in chapters 2 and 3) that should be seriously considered in decision making around issues of cultural preservation (see Maredza 1985) and forest conservation (Makuku 1993a, 1993b; Mawere 2012).

This observation agrees with the highly optimistic approaches of the 1980s and 1990s advocated by scholars such as Maredza (1985), Latour (1988), Scoones and Matose (1993), Makuku (1993a), Haraway (2003, 2006, 2007), and Agrawal (1995) which critiqued the older modernist ideas of separating nature from people as well as state centred conservation/fortress conservation. The approaches by most of the aforementioned scholars emphasised the need to move towards the so-called active participation of the local communities in the conservation of resources. The approaches (especially as espoused by Haraway) also challenges the asymmetrical relationships existent between humans and other beings as evidenced by blame laid on insects by some scholars (see Bongor 1999; Capinera 2010). Donna Haraway argues that species of all kinds meet in a more connected and cosmopolitan world (cf. Donna Haraway 2003, 2006, 2007). In that approach, life is a collective project of species and technologies. The interaction of *harurwa* and people in conservation in the Norumedzo is a case in point, as will be seen in this study.

In view of the abovementioned inadequacies/research gaps and shortcomings, I argue that these can best be filled in by giving particular attention to further studies of *harurwa*. In the light of this proposition, the present study offers a novel anthropological framework that aims to develop new knowledge of the relationships between *harurwa*, forests, human beings and the state in conservation in Zimbabwe. The approach used in this study is in agreement with the anthropological approach that Lien and Law (2010: 5) allude to when they argue that “through attention to practices and performativity, we may contribute to an anthropology which is more sensitive to relations between humans and other living beings than is possible in a more anthropocentric approach”. Lack of a ‘sustainable dialogue’ between humans, state and other beings like insects seems to have been prompted by the idea that humans are superior to other beings and or nature. This has been noted by Fairbanks (2010) who avers: “Until recently, Western virtue ethics has never recognised nature-focused virtues. This is not surprising, since western philosophies and religions have promoted the ideas that humans are superior to nature and that there are no moral principles regulating our relationship to nature”. Yet “this anthropocentric approach emphasises particular qualities of the human-animal phenomena on the basis of relations of asymmetry marked by animal subordination. In other words it separates

‘culture’ (human) and ‘nature’ (other beings) on the basis of unequal distribution of agency” (Lien and Law 2010:10). In fact, instead of emphasising social connections and interdependence between humans and other beings, Western virtue ethics emphasises animal subordination by humans solely on the basis on rationality and agency. This binary has the disadvantage of upsetting the natural ecosystem, as it gives humans the mandate to exploit nature without recourse.

It is in this light that the present research seeks to criticise the central tenets of modernist thought by challenging the asymmetrical relations between humans and other beings and showing that ‘the everyday’ challenges the world of ideas. Demonstrating the challenge of the everyday to the world of ideas, Hugh Raffles (2010: 4) uses the example of insects on how “in every respect, they (insects) are really very complicated creatures” which don’t keep still, hence difficult to theorise. While Raffles argues for the acknowledgement of other species in his anthropological studies, he also goes a lot further to introduce the post-humanities as a concept that can be possibly used to study humans-insects relationships. Though with its own pitfalls as I have explained in the introduction of this dissertation, post-humanism challenges the ontology of modernity, including the subject-object divide, hence the concept post-human: post-humanist thought refuses the idea that only humans are capable of carrying out actions and respond in systems that are sometimes governed by human rules and laws. Also, post-humanism allows for the equivalence of multiple ways of knowing (Paul Feyerabend cited in Raffles, 2010: 37), though it has to be applied with caution when it comes to how humans should relate with other beings given that if used bluntly the theory potentially threatens human dignity and the essence of humanity (Simon 2003).

Acknowledging the merits of such an approach in cultural studies, Wolfe (2010) echoes that vibrant, rigorous post-humanism is vital for addressing questions of ethics and justice, language and trans-species communication, social systems and the intellectual aspirations of interdisciplinarity. Yet when applied to conservation and knowledge studies, the post-humanities approach is not without challenges. As Green (2011) argues, a challenge for the post-humanities is how to engage different knowledges without once again privileging the “newest” or those knowledge forms that are finding their way into curricula for the first time. To a research project such as this one, a post-humanities approach, however, remains critical in that it challenges the founding dualisms (such as nature-culture divide and subject-object dualism) and offers researchers on knowledge the opportunity to engage different intellectual heritages as well as resources for rich engagement with the different knowledges and ways of knowing (see also

Green 2011). This is important as has been argued by Raffles (2010: 18) that [ethnographic] research is not merely documentation, but “is a way of achieving multidimensional knowledge of the subject, a way to see it in its biological, phenomenological and political fullness, not only a way to express what we see”. In this sense, the post-humanities approach in conservation and knowledge studies is important as long as it considers humans and other beings in the production and advancement of knowledge in a universe they share as collective and interdependent social members. Put differently, a convincing post-humanities approach is that which seriously considers the presence of different participants, fields of knowledge and conservation fields without compromising the essence of humanity and undermining human dignity in any way. In this way, all players in conservation (for example, science, endogenous epistemologies/local practices, *harurwa*, humans, forests) will be recognised as participants and/or relations or “actants” (to use Latour 1988:192) that are not an exception in the search for knowledge and wisdom. It is envisioned that all players will facilitate better lives and help create a better world (for both humans and other beings) that is peaceful, just and anchored with sustainable conservation and development.

In the light of the above, my research is challenging to the discipline of anthropology in so far as it expands the anthropological approach in very valuable ways such as examining conservation practices among rural communities, particularly in the Norumedzo Area and how it mirrors mutual symbiotic relations between humans and other beings.

Ethical considerations of the study

Ethical questions in the area of research with human subjects, particularly on how research participants should be treated, have become a cause of concern over the past two decades. As Fiona Ross rightly points out, the “research enterprise is inherently risky” (Ross 2005:100). Thus bearing in mind that ethical concerns may arise whenever research is carried out, the guiding principles of the University of Cape Town’s (UCT) code governing research on human subjects and Anthropology Southern Africa, consider as their ethical guidelines that whenever conducting research with human subjects, informed consent in terms of participation of the latter should always be considered. Besides, the research should bear no risks to participants during and after the research process. This research is politically neutral to the extent that it is unlikely to attract suspicion from active political groups in Zimbabwe. Yet, I am quite aware that while my research carries minimum sensitivities, the context of contemporary Zimbabwe, with its fraught politics,

makes the presence of any researcher potentially harmful, and indeed, carries certain risks which might not have been anticipated by the researcher. In light of this understanding, possible risks were avoided by careful and continuous monitoring of the research process right from the outset.

Ethical questions in the area of research with human subjects, particularly on how research participants should be treated, have become a cause of concern over the past two decades. To address these concerns, photographing was done voluntarily and with the participants' consent. I had designed a consent form that addressed the issues of obtaining interviews and use of camera recordings separately. However, on noting that most of my interlocutors were a rural, old generation and not interested in writing things down, worse still signing, I resorted to the use of word of mouth to explain to them [interlocutors] and seek their consent for participation before any activity related to my study. In fact, I made it a policy that each encounter with my participants was initiated with an introductory note specifying the research objectives, benefits of the research and ensuring them that their right to confidentiality/anonymity (if they choose) is respected. In view of the latter (anonymity), pseudonyms were used except in cases where respondents chose to be identified. Consent was also obtained prior to the commencement of the research activities. The willing participants were provided with information on the study and copies of their signed consent forms. I also used an open door policy for my participants such that should anyone of them felt uncomfortable during the research process, be it interviews, focus group discussions and other activities to do with my research, they were free to discontinue themselves. Participants were, therefore, free to withdraw at any time she or he wished to do so. More so, it is worthwhile to note that there is no possibility that this research on *harurwa* might contribute to bioprospecting of the insects as they are already very well described in the scientific literature (see Dzerefos 2005; Teffo 2007). Besides, there is a thriving trade in *harurwa* in the food markets of the region, and nutritional research (Dzerefos 20005) on them has already been done.

It should be underscored that in this chapter, I discussed detailed fieldwork site background issues, methodological positions, research approach and data collection processes of this study. The purposes of a methodological stance are manifold: inter alia, to unravel puzzlement, quest for appropriateness of purpose of techniques adopted, to describe and critique situations, scenarios and events (Kaplan 1973; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2000). I drew on a theoretical approach developed in chapter 4 and epistemological foundations of this work to provide a method and approach that is analytical and critical in order to be able to

unravel the complex relations, networks and interactions in the Norumedzo Communal Area. Given the social networks, relations and interactions in the Norumedzo Forest and the communal area at large, multiple approaches and methods of data collection were necessary in unravelling, understanding and interpreting strategies used in the conservation of the *jiri* and the networks around *harurwa*.

Organisation of the dissertation

In chapter 1, I describe my fieldwork site and discuss my research approach, the data collection process, and methods of data analysis. My analysis is informed by my theoretical framework that serves as the logical and analytical lenses to unraveling and interpreting ethnographic data.

The purpose of chapter 2 is twofold: To discuss the challenge of the *jiri*, in terms of how these have over the years promoted the mutual, symbiotic coexistence of *vanhu* and other beings; and to provide insights into how the complex concepts of nature/culture and human/nonhuman relations have been conceptualised. The chapter, thus, explores how the ideas behind the *jiri* unsettle or challenge the thinking by some conservationists that only formal science and human beings can promote sustainable conservation; and to discuss possibilities for an epistemological shift in Anthropology to rethink the ways in which the binaries of humans and other beings, nature and culture, knowledge and belief have served to confine anthropological attention to the social. This is done through an attempt to test some key aspects of post-humanism in conservation policy and practice in rural Zimbabwe with a view of exploring how the concepts of nature/culture could be reconceptualised to illuminate understanding of how interactional networks in conservation could be fostered. Where the key aspects of post-humanism fail to resonate with my ethnographic data, the engagement perspective proposed earlier in this work and Jose David Saldivar and Ramon Grosfoguel's critical border thinking are deployed directly or otherwise. Critical border thinking is a theory that responds "to both hegemonic and marginal fundamentalisms" in conservation sciences and knowledge studies (Mignolo 2000; Grosfoguel 2006a, 2006b, 2011: 2). The latter approach (critical border thinking) goes beyond the modernistic binary system (Losonczy 1993; Escobar 2008: 116) of conservation, a polarisation that established such divisions as nature versus culture and science versus indigenous knowledge. Highlighting that such dichotomies limit conservation knowledge and make us vulnerable to the "danger of a single story", I argue in this chapter that inasmuch as modernist science alone has

failed to solve Zimbabwe's environmental conservation problems, indigenous epistemologies are also bound to fail if they are used to the exclusion of science.

In chapter 3, I examine the centrality of personhood as understood from Varumedzo's view point, especially on how it informs and influences the kind of conservation and resource management they engage in as well as their 'network' based interactions with the world around them. Closely linked to the Varumedzo's conservation practices are also their historical accounts of the origins of *harurwa* in the Norumedzo Area. These will be examined in this chapter, just as the Varumedzo's conception of personhood, as the accounts also inform and influence the people's conservation practices. A central argument in this chapter is that understanding the conception of personhood of the Varumedzo and the historical accounts associated with the origins of *harurwa* in Norumedzo, are fundamentally important as these are the windows to grasping forest conservation in that area. To grasp the Norumedzo people's conception of personhood as well as their conservation practices, some African scholars' ideas and African-based theories, such as *ubuntu*, are explored to understand the genesis and philosophical basis of conservation in the Norumedzo and to enhance the post-humanities perspective alluded to earlier in this work.

Chapter 4 emphasises the politics around forest conservation and the impact that political tensions could have on forest conservation in rural Zimbabwe. The chapter sets the political paradigm within which forest conservation is analysed in this study. In this chapter, I therefore follow up the arguments in chapter 3, particularly on ontological conflicts, by focusing on social tensions, village politics and power dynamics in the Norumedzo Communal Area through the lenses of scholars like Foucault as well as those who have exported the philosophy of *ubuntu* into the spheres of politics and governance such as Bhengu (1996) and Sindane (1995). This is done to show the impacts of politics on the utilisation and conservation of natural resources such as forests and non-timber forest products such as *harurwa*.

Chapter 5 explores in greater detail the matrix of *harurwa*, particularly on how they are perceived by the local people in terms of conservation of the Norumedzo *Jiri*. While to a great extent the Norumedzo case can be considered as a success story of environmental conservation by "local" or rural communities, this study does not romanticise "traditional conservation" but examine it critically, hence the chapter focuses on both the achievements and negative impacts of the *jiri* through the lenses of critical philosophy and *ubuntu*. Examining perceived achievements by the people living in the study area is critical to understanding both the merits and shortfalls of conservation practices in the Norumedzo Communal Area.

In the conclusion, I discuss the general contribution as well as the theoretical contribution, general implications and limitations of this study. It is emphasised that mutual relations between humans and other beings, as espoused in my engagement zones perspective, are crucial for fostering sustainable environment conservation in rural communities although studying these relations in face-to-face contact is hard and using them in national conservation projects such as those of Zimbabwe is a challenge.

In the chapter that follows, I discuss literature that dwells on environmental conservation in Zimbabwe, followed by possibilities for epistemological shifts in Anthropology. This is done with the intention to develop symmetrical Anthropology and shed light on the efficacy of a post-humanities approach that goes beyond binaries between humans and other beings, but without compromising human dignity and the essence of humanity, as shall be explained in detail in chapters 2 and 3.

CHAPTER 2: *Harurwa* and the Challenge of the *Jiri*

Introduction

I have explained in the introduction of this study that in the Norumedzo *Jiri*, there is a cobweb of relations between human beings and other beings such as insects, plants, ancestors, mermaids and others. I have also pointed out that all the aforementioned actants benefit from each other in one way or another in so far as they each help in their own terms in the conservation of the *jiri*. In the introduction, I did not however, discuss the challenge of the *jiri* in terms of its location in the Norumedzo Communal Area, other important features found therein (in the *jiri*), and how its conservation practices challenge many people. In this chapter, I discuss *harurwa* and the challenge of the Norumedzo *Jiri* as well as humans and other beings' interactions in conservation in south-eastern Zimbabwe. Such a discussion is important as it affords us the opportunity to unravel, understand and interpret the different perspectives from which *harurwa* and the *jiri* have been conceptualised and dealt with in academic and conservation literature.

The Norumedzo *Jiri*

Norumedzo *jiri* is located in a big valley bordered by two mountains, Nemahwi on the north and Rumedzo on the far southeast. The forest is at a central position of the Norumedzo Communal Area between the villages under the jurisdiction of four grandsons of Nemeso – the forefather of the Norumedzo people – three of whom are *harurwa* administrators, and one is the current chief Norumedzo. From my observations these grandsons, together with many other headmen as well as all other community members under the jurisdiction of Chief Norumedzo, are responsible (directly or otherwise) for the conservation of the *jiri* to ensure the continued existence of *harurwa* therein (in the *jiri*). See picture below (figure 4) of the *jiri* from a distant.



Figure 4: The jiri from a distance

Besides being endowed with the edible insects, *harurwa*, the *jiri* is a source of one of the prominent rivers in Bikita District. This is where the Mukore River has its source, and it flows down through the *jiri* into the Chivaka River. See picture below (figure 5).

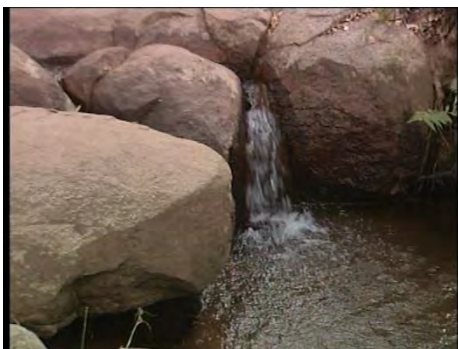


Figure 5: Part of the jiri where Mukore River has its source

As highlighted above, the *jiri* is controlled by the Chief (Norumedzo) and his traditional leadership (village heads) through four *harurwa* administrators and *harurwa* policemen. For the whole of the *harurwa* season between March and August/September, a caretaker team comprising four *harurwa* administrators and *harurwa* policemen (actual number varies year by

year) stay and shelter themselves in the *musasa*⁸ (*harurwa* camp) at the centre of the *jiri*. The caretaker team is paid rotationally in kind through *harurwa* shares which they eat and sell to sustain their families. To avoid conflicts between community members regarding who should be involved in the caretaker team, the selection of a new caretaker team is done every year. The rotational selection of the members of the *harurwa* caretaker team – from each of the fifty-six villages (of which 44 are registered and 12 unregistered) is done every year when the *harurwa* season approaches. The team is responsible for monitoring the *jiri* in terms of enforcing norms, traditions and practices concerning *jiri* conservation and *harurwa*. The team normally operates in the *jiri* during *harurwa* season where they will be sheltered in the *musasa*.

The *musasa* is a triangular shaped hut that is constructed annually during the first part of the *harurwa* season – normally in April – at the central part of the *jiri* (using locally available material such as poles and thatching grass) to shelter the *harurwa* caretaker team, and it is destroyed at season's end. In 2012, the *musasa* was 12m long and 7m wide, and could accommodate 30-40 people at a time, seated side by side. Many people were of the view that the position where *musasa* is built does not change and is said to have remained unchanged since the time of Nemeso, the “*harurwa* causer” in the *jiri* and forefather of the Varumedzo. One village elder in his late 70s, Sekuru Takura (not his real name) reported: “*Kubva tichikura panongovakirwa musasa mvaka wega-wega ndipapa pakati pejiri. Hapachinji. Ndizvo zvakataurwa zvakasiya zvataurwa nezibambo redu Nemeso kuti zvinofanira kutevedzera nevana vose vachatevera.*”/Ever since, the *musasa* has been constructed seasonally at this central part of the *jiri*. The position should not be shifted as this will be acting contrary to what our forefather, Nemeso said should always be the case for all generations to come”.

When the *harurwa* season ends towards end of August each year, the *musasa* is burnt down to ashes using fire as a sign to mark the end of the *harurwa* season. The Varumedzo call this *kuparadzwa musasa*, which besides being a sign to mark the end of *harurwa* season, is done to ensure that no person can use the material that was used in the construction of the *musasa*. Though this seems to be destructive in a sense, the Varumedzo view it differently. For them,

⁸ In Shona, the word *Musasa* denotes a number of things. It can refer to the name of a tree scientifically known as *Brachystegia spiciformis*. It can also refer to a people's temporary home. In the context of this discussion, the word designates a rectangular shaped structure of about 12m long and 7m wide built in the *jiri* to shelter *harurwa* administrators and *harurwa* policemen during *harurwa* season. When *harurwa* season is officially declared over, the *musasa* is burnt to ashes as the material used to build the structure is not allowed by *chikaranga* (tradition) to be taken home. The position where the *musasa* is built every year has not changed and is believed to have remained the same since the time of Nemeso, the forefather of the Varumedzo.

kuparadzwa musasa is an enduring tradition that started a long time ago and has to be followed as it is considered violation of cultural practices to take away the materials that were used to construct the *musasa*. I was told this was an honour of Nemeso's words who declared that once the *harurwa* season is over the *musasa* should be destroyed as no one is allowed to stay in the *jiri* beyond this time, and to use the materials that were used to construct the *musasa*. Since Nemeso's time, *kudzika bango* (constructing *musasa*) and *kuparadzwa musasa*, thus, became a tradition and part of the culture for the Norumedzo people: *Kudzika bango* and *kuparadzwa musasa* have to be done every season, that is, once every year. See picture below (figure 6) showing people constructing *musasa* in the *jiri*.



Figure 6: *Musasa being constructed at the centre of the jiri*

Failure to observe the tradition of *kudzika bango* is believed to anger the ancestors (*zvinotsamwisa vadzimu*) who in turn may cause *harurwa* to migrate from the *jiri*. As narrated by chief Norumedzo, at one time people violated the tradition and the *harurwa* flew away from the *jiri* until traditional beer (*doro revadzimu*) was brewed to appease the angry ancestors.

The study found out that every headman together with his or her subjects in the Norumedzo are obliged to democratically select at least one policeman to represent the village in the *harurwa* caretaker team every year. The selection is democratic in some way because it is done by (and in the presence of) all villagers, men and women. A form of participatory democracy, thus, is exercised in the Norumedzo selection of *harurwa* administrators and *harurwa* policemen which allows the latter to keep on rotating among the community members, and with the positions of *harurwa* administrators rotating among the members of the ruling family (*imba youshe*). The *harurwa* administrators for 2012 *harurwa* season were Mr Pio Roza, Mr Francis Vengesai Mugumisi, Mr Philmon Magare and Mr Mahamba W.G. Rambanapasi, all from the ruling family. Their responsibilities, as *harurwa* administrators, were to act as overseers of *harurwa* harvesting and *jiri* protection. The aforementioned administrators together with the *harurwa*

policemen comprised a complete *harurwa* caretaker team that resided at the *musasa* controlling *harurwa* harvesting and exploitation of other non-timber forest products in the *jiri* during the time at which I was carrying out fieldwork.

To facilitate *pikiti* (controlling) of the *jiri* resources by *harurwa* policemen and *harurwa* administrators, and to avoid over-harvesting (of *harurwa*) in any one part of the *jiri*, some names have been given to different parts of the *jiri*. On the Norumedzo Communal Area shown on Map 3, the places are from the eastern part of the *jiri* to the north, west and then south in that order: Mutondo wamazizi, Bako rengwe, Rushuro, Maruwana, Mushavhi, Chitaka, Masarasara, Chinemaparu, Matadyiwana, Zvikunza, Guva ravasikana, Mawomowomo, Chiware, Rusvinga, Rumhashu and Chirivana (the central portion/area where *Mutoro*⁹ is located). The *jiri* institution, thus, is run according to the Varumedzo's customs, traditions and practices. Worth noting is my observation that all the names that were attributed to the different parts of the *jiri* were significant in a way as they were all symbolic and pregnant with meaning. For example, the name *Mutondo wamazizi* (*lit* mutondo tree of owls) has a big mutondo tree (*Julbernardia globiflora*) which is a habitat of owls. Every time I visited the tree, I found owls in the tree or roaming around the area. At Bako Rengwe (*lit* the Leopard's Cave) are rock boulders with a huge cave where a big leopard used to live. The leopard was believed to be an ancestral one (*mbondoro yemudzimu*) that intimidated or attacked those who stole or harvested *harurwa* without following the proper set procedures. Rushuro (*lit* the hare's citadel) is a bushy place where hare are normally found; it has a habitat favourable for hares. Mushavhi is a place in the *jiri* where a big mushavhi tree (*Ficus ingens*) is found. All other remaining names are likewise symbolic and significant in so far as they were said (by my interlocutors in Norumedzo) to have been attributed in relation to certain phenomena associated with the places.

Besides being symbolic, I was informed the names of these places facilitate *harurwa* harvesting and *jiri* controlling systems as they make it easier for administrators to distribute *harurwa* policemen for *pikiti* (patrolling at night and during the day). The same names are also used by administrators and policemen when harvesting *harurwa* given that *jiri* is extensive. For example, *harurwa* administrators may decide that on a particular day, people harvest *harurwa* from Rushuro or from Mutondo wamazizi, and so on.

⁹ *Mutoro* is a big *muchirara* (*Pterocarpus rotundifolius*) tree at the centre of the *jiri*. I was told by the *harurwa* administrators that this tree is where all *harurwa* left in the *jiri* ultimately fly to as harvesting is done from the outer parts of the *jiri* and not from the inside. *Harurwa* at *mutoro* are normally harvested end of August, which is the official end of the *harurwa* season.

Though *harurwa* as actors are at the centre of *jiri* protection, I observed that together with set restrictions or sacred controls, myths and legends attached to the *jiri* and other non-timber forest products such as black crickets (*machenya*), grasshoppers (*mhashu*), termites/*Macrotermes* spp (*ishwa/majuru* in vernacular Shona), wildlife, bees, medicinal plants, mushroom/*hova* and wild fruit trees also give local people reasons to protect the *jiri*. During my fieldwork, I observed that *hova* (mushroom), for example, constitute a large proportion of the local people's diet especially during the rainy season. The various kinds of *hova* I observed in the *jiri* were these below:

BOTANICAL NAME	LOCAL NAME	AREA(S) FOUND
<i>Amanita zambiana</i>	<i>Nbedzi</i>	<i>Jiri</i> and mountains around the <i>jiri</i>
<i>Cantharellus densifolius</i>	<i>Firifiti</i>	<i>Jiri</i> and mountains around the <i>jiri</i>
<i>Boletus edulis</i>	<i>Matindindi</i>	<i>Jiri</i> and mountains around the <i>jiri</i>

Table 3: Different varieties of mushroom found in the *jiri*

To ensure the protection of some tree species that have values (such as medicinal properties or those that bear edible fruits) attached to them, there are myths attached to firewood gathering. From the stories I heard about firewood I observed, for example, that all fruit trees could not be used for firewood as fruits constitute a large proportion of the local people's diet especially during times of droughts.

The other important observation I made was that timber for construction was not collected from the *jiri* but from the lower parts of the mountains, valleys and outskirts of the fields. Traditional rules relating to sacred areas and trees were also still adhered to, in particular for Norumedzo *Jiri*. Christians and village politics were blamed, in several cases, by traditional leadership and traditionalists for contributing towards the loss of respect for 'sacred' places bordering the *jiri* such as Nemahwi and Rumedzo Mountains. This suggests that tradition is normally presented as unproblematic or unchallenged. Christians, for example, were accused on the basis that they go and hold night prayers in those mountains. Others were accused for encroaching on the mountains where their [locals] *mapa* (ancestors/forefathers' graves or

autochthonous phenomenon) are found, what traditionalists considered as *kufukura hapwa* (lit: revealing inner secrets and in this case tampering with their sacred places). Such actions were believed to anger ancestors who in turn could cause suffering and tribulations to the living people. Cases of *kufukura hapwa*, as I witnessed during fieldwork, were dealt with at Chief Norumedzo's *dare* (traditional court of law). Those convicted were made to pay fines in the form of cash, livestock or were sometimes asked to brew beer to appease ancestral spirits.

Besides myths associated with the Norumedzo *Jiri*, the fact that the *jiri* acts as a pharmaceutical reserve for traditional healers in the area also explains why protection in the *jiri* is so organised. The existence of relations with forest and myths associated with forest protection is not unique to the Varumedzo as elsewhere scholars (Sheridan and Nyamweru 2008; Mukamuri 1995a; Bradley and McNamara 1993; Sheridan 2008) have noted the same. Sheridan (2008), for example, shows the meaning of trees in different parts of Africa and how the meanings relate to both group identities and experiences. In showing how the Varumedzo relate with the forest, Mr Ponesai (not his real name), a traditional healer cum headman in a nearby village confirmed that he obtains some of his herbs to cure ailments from the *jiri*. The *jiri*, thus, stands out as a place where networks of relations between humans and other entities are observable.

Understanding *harurwa*

Harurwa [singular/plural] are edible forest insects known as edible stinkbugs (*Encosternum delegorguei* spinola). The insects are harvested and traded locally and regionally in a network that stretches across at least four countries in sub-Saharan Africa: Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mozambique and Botswana. Besides, *harurwa* are a treasure in the Norumedzo in so far as their existence has resulted in the protection of a forest (known as Norumedzo *Jiri*) where these insects thrive. In fact there is interdependence and a matrix of relationships between the forests, *harurwa*, and humans in so far as the latter depend on *harurwa* for their livelihood, while the continued existence of *harurwa* in the Norumedzo also depends on the protection of the forests [by humans] in the area. For these reasons, *harurwa*, though known as edible stinkbugs in the English language, are locally described as “*zvipembenene zvegoridhe*” (lit: golden butterflies) in so far as, besides their golden colour when roasted, they are apparently much desired, as part of local diets, and help sustain locals' lives through barter trading and, contemporarily, the generation of foreign currency. This means that those who depend on the insects for their livelihood and for forest protection think differently from the European settlers in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) who, being unfamiliar with the insects, gave them the name ‘edible stinkbugs’ basing on the mere fact

that the insects, while edible, produce a smell and chemicals they use as defensive mechanism against predators. For this reason and the reason that the term stinkbugs also include other insect species such as non-edible stinkbugs, I prefer using the term *harurwa* to the name edible stinkbugs.

Bearing in mind that natural science is not the sole means of providing an account of the natural world, I sought to study the insects, *harurwa*, to compare, confirm and debunk what natural science has so far offered concerning *harurwa*.

During fieldwork, I made several important observations about *harurwa*. I observed, for example, that *harurwa* are social insects that live at peace with other insect species as they share their habitat with other insect species namely black stinkbugs (also named locally as *magashu*) and *ndongwe* (grey locusts); that *harurwa* are winged forest insects in a family of large stinkbugs classified locally as *zvipembenene* (Field notes, June 2012) and by entomologists as *Tessaratomidae* or inflated stinkbugs (for scholars who describe *harurwa* morphology see also Picker et al 2004; Schuh and Slater 1995; Ho and Chen 2010; Teloff 2006; Imms et al 1977). I also observed that there are different kinds of *harurwa* depending on their size, colour and taste when eaten. From the local taxonomy of the Varumedzo, I learnt the names of *harurwa* according to their colour, size and taste from the harvesters. Three types of *harurwa* were distinguished namely, *harurwa chipembenene* (with white tiny spots beneath their wings), *harurwa benzji* (with white and black tiny spots – they are smelly), and *harurwa* (those that are wholly green in colour). Though the three types of *harurwa* are all edible, *harurwa* are most preferred as they are not smelly and are tastier. I further observed that all the three types of *harurwa* come into season at the same time of the year and share the same habitat. In my sense, the living together of these different insects depicted their social character. See picture (figure 7) below of the different *harurwa* species found in the *jiri*.



Figure 7: The local taxonomy of harurwa – three types of harurwa – discussed above

In addition to the above observations, I could confirm through my study of the insects' bodies that *harurwa* are one of the ten species of *Tessaratomidae* in southern Africa (see also Picker *et al* 2004), and the local characterisation of the Varumedzo mentioned above. All species of *Tessaratomidae* possess a piercing sucking mouth, a part known as a rostrum (Ho and Chen 2010). This makes it possible for them to feed on plant sap and vapour condensation (Makuku 1993; Dzerefos *et al* 2009). In the case of *harurwa* in particular, I observed that though I always found them [*harurwa*] in swarms in different trees, most of the tree leaves were intact and not destroyed or eaten away. When I asked why the leaves are always intact and not destroyed when the *harurwa* are always in the trees, one of the *harurwa* administrators, Mr Mugumisi told me, “*harurwa* are mysterious insects. They don't feed on plant leaves as locusts do, but only feed on dew and rain water. If you see any leaf destroyed, it's not *harurwa* but locusts which normally come into season at the same time with *harurwa*”. On hearing this, I spent a lot of time making efforts to observe for myself if this was true, and for all the time I stayed in the Norumedzo, I never witnessed any *harurwa* feeding on tree leaves or vegetation in general. Besides, Mr Mugumisi's words were confirmed by all the people I interviewed. This observation was critical as it corrects Mjele (1934) and Cuthbertson's (1934) respective assertions that *harurwa* feed on the leaves of *muzhanje* (*Uapaca kirkiana*), and that *harurwa* appear in swarms on certain trees *umbobobobo/muzhanje* (*Uapaca kirkiana*). Contrary to their observations, I observed that *harurwa* are not always found in swarms

and are not selective in terms of the trees they are found. There was no doubt that *harurwa* are social insects that live at peace with other insect species; their relations with humans motivate forest protection in the *jiri*; and they are devoted to serve their lives from predators through their defensive *fuve* (allomones). In this sense, I could see that *harurwa* pose a profound challenge to the very idea of conservation, a challenge that unsettles the very idea that only rational human actors can participate in forest conservation. It was also during fieldwork in the Norumedzo that I observed that while some *Tessaratomids* are quite colourful, *harurwa* in particular are light green in colour, and some have tiny spots on their wings which can hardly be observed if one is not observant. *Tessaratomids* range in size from the smallest members, *Sepinini* of 6 to 7mm to the large *Tessaratomini* which can be up to 45mm (1.8 in) in length (Picker *et al* 2004; Schuh and Slater 1995). It is worth noting that *harurwa* is one of the less-researched families of the *Tessaratomids* in southern Africa (Dzerefos *et al* 2009).

Though no comprehensive scientific research on the life cycle of *harurwa* has been carried out before in the Norumedzo and elsewhere (as far as I know), it appears that the life cycle of *harurwa* is similar to that of locusts. My reasons for making this analogy encompass: When officially off-season, that is, between September and February, *harurwa* no longer stay in the tall trees found in the *jiri* as they do when in season – between March and August. Instead, they were found mainly in the tall grass and shrubs lying idle. On careful examination of their bodies, I discovered that most of the *harurwa* I found on shrubs and grass during off-season already had numerous eggs in their abdomen. The eggs were yellow in colour. This observation made me believe that *harurwa* lay their eggs under the ground. It appeared to me that the period between September and February is the time when eggs are laid, hatched and the larvae undergo the same process as locusts until March when the pupae will have fully developed into *harurwa*. This observation was confirmed by my chief respondents who reported that every year, *harurwa* start their season in March. Notwithstanding my observations during fieldwork, the life cycle of *harurwa* remains a mystery as I failed to observe the insects while in their larva and pupa stages, which perhaps calls for further research on *harurwa* life cycle by biologists/entomologists. Also, no one in the Norumedzo Area reported to have seen the insects in those stages over the years, resulting in some people believing that *harurwa* are insects given annually as food to the Norumedzo people by their ancestors. Others believe *harurwa* just come from the air when they are in season.

In 2012, the period in which I was carrying out fieldwork in the area, *harurwa* season started on the 13th of March. The *harurwa* ‘announced’ themselves around 9 o’clock in the

morning. The sky was blue and the day promised to be hot. I was heading towards the *jiri*. Barely a kilometre from the school premises, I suddenly saw a big yellowish cloud that appeared from nowhere covering the sun. I stood for a moment bewildered as I could see that the cloud was accompanied by a buzzing sound. There was a homestead by the road on which I was walking. I decided to get to the homestead and ask if they were also aware of this strange ‘cloud’. As I drew nearer the homestead, I could see that all the people were already outside observing the same phenomenon. “What is it?” I asked before I could even greet them as dictated by *Chivanhu* of the Norumedzo people. “Oh they are *harurwa*, they are coming for the season,” a man in his middle age answered. I could feel a sense of contentment filling my heart as this was confirming the data I had gathered before during the initial days of my fieldwork. I had been told that when *harurwa* appear for their first time in season they gather around the sun for some hours before they descend on the forest where they are normally discovered by children between the ages of 5 and 12. I became very attentive and curious to see what would happen next. For about two and half hours, the cloud remained unmoved until it descended eastwards [from where I was standing] before it disappeared. The following day, it was reported that *harurwa* season had started – some *harurwa* had been seen in a forest near the *jiri* by little children coming from Norumedzo Primary School. See figure 8 for the *harurwa* cloud below.

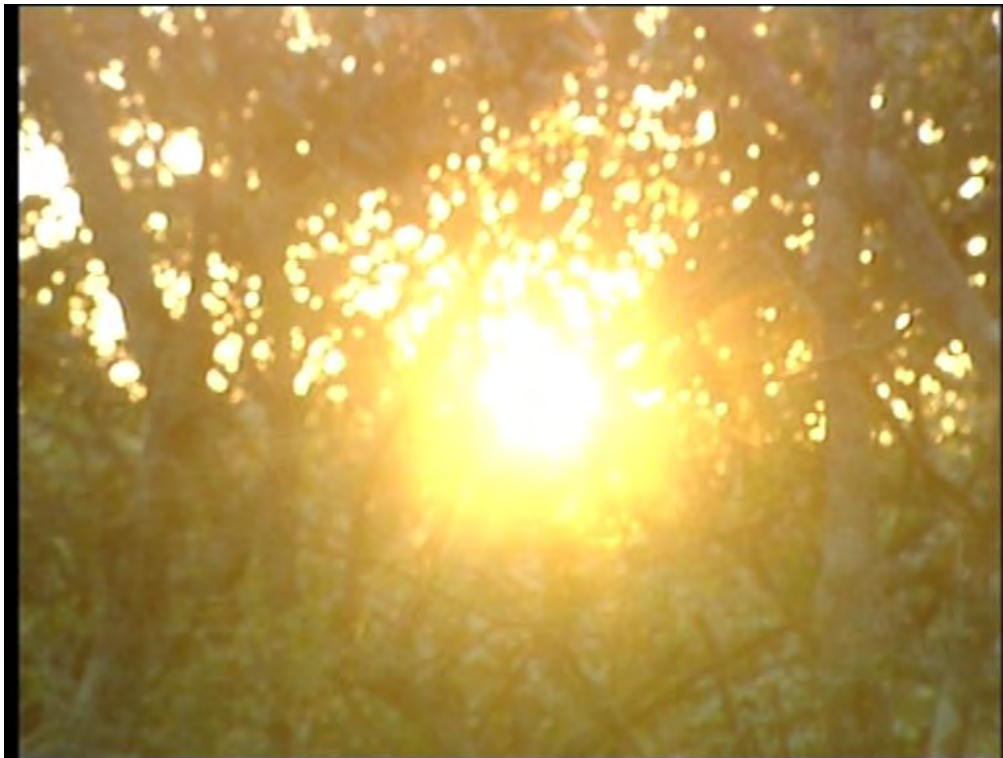


Figure 8: A cloud of *harurwa* around the sun as they mark the beginning of their season

I was challenged and perplexed by this event and became even more curious to understand why *harurwa* gather around the sun when they appear for the first time in season. I changed my schedule for that day and started gathering the locals' views on this phenomenon. Three different views were given by people on this question. The first was that *harurwa* gather around the sun when they appear for the first time in order to obtain energy to sustain themselves during their season. The second view was that *harurwa* gather around the sun when they appear for the first time just as a sign to mark their beginning. As one respondent said, "Our ancestors are very good. When *harurwa* come for their season, they announce to us by making them visible [around the sun] to anyone in this area. Once we see the *harurwa* cloud, we all know that the season for *harurwa* has started". The third answer I got was that it is believed *harurwa* originate from the air. As such, they fly around the sun as that is their path down to the earth.

From my interlocutors' responses, one could easily be convinced by the first answer above given that *harurwa* do not feed on organic food for the whole period they dwelt in the *jiri*, that is, from March to around August/September. It therefore appeared to me that *harurwa* would gather around the sun in order to obtain energy that would sustain them for the whole season.

As highlighted in the introduction of this section, in Zimbabwe, edible stinkbugs (*Enconsternum delegorguei* Spinola) are most widely known as '*harurwa*' or '*harugwa*' in Zimbabwe (Nyathi 2005; Chidavaenzi 2010; fieldnotes 2012). In South Africa, they are known as '*thongolifha*' or '*tsonono*' (Dzerefos 2009:750; Dzerefos 2011). Throughout this study these names will be used interchangeably though I prefer the name *harurwa* as it was the one used most in the Norumedzo. As their defence mechanism, *harurwa* have defensive chemicals, allomones (El-Sayed 2009) against predators such as birds (Raska 2009) that can cause temporary blindness and significant damage if they come in contact with eyes and skin. This means that during harvesting, harvesters should avoid eye and skin contact with the insects. I observed the effects of allomones (*fuve* in vernacular Shona) during fieldwork in the *jiri*: It was one early morning when I observed a small dog that had accompanied one of the *harurwa* harvesters to the *jiri* being affected by the *harurwa* allomones. It jumped up and down in pain, squeezing its head against the ground whimpering. See the picture (figure 9) below showing a dog affected by *harurwa fuve* during *harurwa* harvesting in the *jiri*:



Figure 9: A dog that was affected by *harurwa* fufe during harvesting in the *jiri*

While *harurwa* can cause temporary blindness (to predators or whoever comes into contact with their *fufe*), they remain an important food and source of income for some people in southern Africa and in particular Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Botswana and South Africa. For this reason, in Zimbabwe *harurwa* have earned themselves the name *zvipembenene zvegovidhe* (golden flies). In Zimbabwe, *harurwa* are found in many parts of the country, especially in the southeastern parts namely Norumedzo, Glen Livet, Mukanganwi, and Bota – all in Masvingo province. In South Africa the insects are found in abundance in the northeastern parts of the country, particularly in Thohoyandou, Ga-Modjdji and Bushbuckridge (Dzerefos et al 2009). The observations I made during my ethnographic studies of *harurwa* in the Norumedzo Communal Area revealed that unlike in other areas (such as Mukanganwi) where no *jiri* was set aside for *harurwa* to thrive in, *harurwa* remain an important source of livelihood for the Norumedzo, and people want to conserve the forest partly because they want to guarantee the existence of *harurwa*. I observed that the general philosophy of life of the Varumedzo is premised on the understanding that the insects, the forests and people are part of one another's lives; their relations are interconnected as one depends on the other for existence and livelihood. See figures 10 and 11 below showing live *harurwa* after harvest and prepared *harurwa* (after roasting) respectively:



Figure 10: Live harurwa after harvesting in the jiri



Figure 11: Roasted harurwa in a plate

Ritual ceremonies and cultural beliefs associated with *harurwa*

As confirmed by the villagers in the Norumedzo Area, since the time of Nemeso, the insects, *harurwa* have always been associated with some rituals, cultural beliefs and practices which according to the Varumedzo should be followed to ensure the continued existence of *harurwa* in the Norumedzo ‘sacred’ forest – the *jiri*. From the observations and interviews I carried out during fieldwork, it was established that Chief Norumedzo (as a traditional leader) and many of his people strongly believe that failure to observe rituals, cultural beliefs and practices associated with *harurwa* and the protection of *jiri* can result in a curse by ancestors who will in turn cause *harurwa* to disappear/extinct from the *jiri*. As Chief Norumedzo pointed out during one of my interviews with him:

All areas in Zimbabwe where Nemeso peacefully settled for a while there is harurwa. These areas include here in Norumedzo, Musikavanhu area in Chipinge, and Bruma of Matsai in Bikita south. However, harurwa in the latter two areas do not exist in abundance simply because the people there do not observe cultural beliefs and practices, including harurwa bira, which were observed since Nemeso’s time. Here, in my area, we still firmly hold on to those practices – that is why harurwa continue to exist in abundance here in the Norumedzo (Interview with Chief Norumedzo, June 2012).

The most important of these practices is the *harurwa bira* (lit: *harurwa* ceremony). The *harurwa bira* is an annual event that takes place a few weeks after the coming into season of *harurwa* (locally known as *kutatara*). The *kutara* (first occurrence of *harurwa* in season) though commonly known to be in the month of March, has no fixed date known. Similarly, the time when *harurwa bira* is held each year varies. In 2012, for example, the *bira* was held on the 10th of May at Chief Norumedzo’s homestead while in the previous year, 2011, *harurwa bira* was reported to have been held in late April. A year prior to 2011, *harurwa bira* was reported to have been held in June.

Rituals associated with *harurwa* include the *Harurwa Bira*. *Harurwa bira* is held yearly as a gesture to thank the ancestors for their [ancestors] gift of *harurwa*, and as a guarantee that will assure the Varumedzo that *harurwa* will stay in the *jiri* and not migrate to other places during their season. Also, the *bira* is a petition to the ancestors that the *harurwa* season for that year be a peaceful one. This is to say that the *harurwa bira* is multi-purpose inter-alia: a thanksgiving to ancestors; a petition for the prevalence of peace (during *harurwa* season) from the ancestors; and also a call for *harurwa* to come in their abundance and stay in the *jiri* during their whole season. If the *bira* is not done or not properly done, it is believed that all *harurwa* abandon the *jiri* and scatter all over the Norumedzo Area and beyond such that they become difficult to catch. This is said to have been witnessed during the previous years when *harurwa* ceremonies were not done

due to chieftainship succession conflicts. This period shall be explained in greater detail in chapter 4 where I discuss social tensions and village politics in the Norumedzo Area and how they have affected conservation in the *jiri*. At this point, it suffices to emphasise that *harurwa bira* is an important [causal] event that has the ability, as the Varumedzo believe, to determine events, for example, direct all the *harurwa* in the Norumedzo to one place, that is, the *jiri* which has always been set aside specifically for the *harurwa* to habitat.

A ritual called *Kumema Munda* is a precursor to the *Harurwa Bira*. Before beer for the *bira* was brewed, the eldest *harurwa* administrator who is the eldest son of the family lineage of Nemeso's eldest son, Nemahwi went out to the *jiri* to do what they call '*kumema munda*' (field inspection). This practice is only done after reports that *harurwa* have now come to season and can possibly be found in the *jiri* and other places around the *jiri*. For the year 2012, the practice was done two days after *harurwa* did what is known as '*kutara*' (buzzing of the *harurwa* as they appear for the first time in a season). When the administrator confirmed that *harurwa* had indeed come into season, he proceeded to make a formal report to the Chief Norumedzo, who is known as the Ishe WeGadzingo raNorumedzo (The Paramount Chief of the Norumedzo people).

When the message about *harurwa* was conveyed to the Chief, it was agreed that rapoko (*chimera/zviyo*) be soaked (*kunyikwa*) and *doro rebira reharurwa* (beer for the *harurwa bira*) brewed. Small quantities of beer were brewed and a male sheep (*gondohwe*) was slaughtered. All the people in the area were invited and a few others were sent out to go and catch some *harurwa* in the *jiri* (specifically for the ceremony). When the *harurwa* were brought, some of them were prepared using warm water before they were roasted without salt changing their colour to a golden brown colour (*ruvara rwendarama*). I should point out that analytically roasting *harurwa* has some symbolic significance among the VaRumedzo. It is ritually transformative as it changes the green *harurwa* from the 'spiritual' domain to human domain (brown) to allow them to be consumed by people.

The roasted *harurwa* were put on a drying sack to cool down. The other *harurwa* were left unprepared (alive). See pictures of unprepared and roasted *harurwa* respectively below (figures 12 and 13):



Figure 12: Live harurwa left unprepared during the harurwa ceremony in Norumedzo



Figure 13: Two of the four 2012 harurwa administrators putting roasted harurwa on a drying sack

After spreading roasted *harurwa* on a drying sack and others put alive in a small basket (*tswanda*), elderly people of the ruling family [descendants of Varumedzo] were invited into a round hut constructed with locally available material. I was invited also, but was not allowed to take any photograph inside the hut as they feared this might anger their ancestors. Everyone entering the hut (including myself) was asked to remove his [her] shoes before entering inside. When all the invited people were gathered, the principal *harurwa* administrator, Mr Mugumisi took four small baskets (*tswanda*) where *harurwa* were put for the ritual. When I asked why four baskets, I was told that the four baskets represented their (the Norumedzo people's) prominent ancestors (*vadzimu vakuru veVarumedzo*) and *masvikiro* (spirit mediums) who were crucial in the protection of the *jiri* and 'cultivation' of *harurwa* therein since the creation of the Norumedzo dynasty. These were Nemeso (the forefather of the Varumedzo), Nemahwi (the eldest son of Nemeso), Rapfirwa (the younger brother of Nemahwi) and Manenga who is the principal spirit medium of the Norumedzo people.

When the small baskets full of *harurwa* were presented before the four ancestors mentioned above, the principal *harurwa* administrator presented to the ancestors: “*Munda wenyu waibva uyu. Tinokumbira muchechetere. Chichengetaiwo vari mudondo umo vari kuchengeta munda wenyu imi vane meso mana. Zviti teve teve*” (Your field is now ready for harvesting. We are kindly asking for peace to prevail all the time harvesting will be done. We also kindly ask you to protect those in the *jiri* guarding your field. Peace be everywhere on this land). After saying these words, he took some live *harurwa* and threw them into the air outside the hut. The thrown out *harurwa* are locally named *makoto* (the name of a unique bird species that feed on *harurwa*). As he threw out these *harurwa* outside the hut he uttered to the ancestors: “*Endai mundatora vakasara munye mose mujiri*” (Go and take all those you left behind and bring them all into the *jiri*). I was told these live *harurwa* will fly into the air to summon the other *harurwa* and back to the forest.

When this was done, a male sheep was taken and presented (*kusumiwa*) to the ancestors. Again the most senior *harurwa* administrator led the session: “*Hewo murirwo wenyu uyu. Hatidi ropa mumunda wenyu. Batai zvinokuvadzwa nekuuraya zrose*” (Here is your relish. We don’t want death in your field. Protect us from all those things that can harm or kill us). After saying these words, women ululated and men whistled clapping their hands. Some rose up and danced in a circle for a while before they resumed their seats. The *harurwa* roasted without salt were all eaten during the ceremony as people were drinking beer. People danced as they drank celebrating the coming of *harurwa*, their source of livelihood and companion in the *jiri* protection. See figure 14 below showing people dancing during *harurwa* ceremony.



Figure 14: *Varumedzo* dancing during the harurwa ceremony in Norumedzo

After the *harurwa bira* – that very day – the principal *harurwa* administrator, Mr Mugumisi went to the *jiri* with a few other village elders to mark the first peg for the *musasa* (a camping hut where *harurwa* administrators and policemen stay during the *harurwa* season). This is known as *kudzimika bango* (marking pegs for the *musasa*).

The beliefs associated with *harurwa* and rituals deployed by the Norumedzo people have helped to protect the *jiri* and kept the insects, *harurwa*, in the area for centuries. The deployment of daily practices in conservation and management of natural resources in some rural communities such as Norumdzo, thus, need to be recognised and integrated in the mainstream conservation discourses. Failure to recognise the importance of the locals' daily practices in conservation and management of natural resources only worsens the already fragile state of conservation in many parts of the country. With this observation, we need therefore, to discuss some key aspects of a post-humanities perspective, particularly those that promote dialogue between different conservation knowledges and practices as well as accord consideration of all actors involved in the protection of forests in Zimbabwe.

Post-humanities perspective in conservation and the conservation problems in Zimbabwe: A critique

In the introduction of this dissertation, I briefly discussed the possibility for rethinking conservation in Zimbabwe in the context of Zimbabwe Natural Environmental Policy and Strategies (ZNEPS). In this and the next section, I discuss in detail the possibilities for rethinking conservation in Zimbabwe, making reference to Norumedzo Communal Area where totally different conservation strategies have been and are being used.

As has been alluded to in the introduction of this dissertation, the case study of Norumedzo poses a challenge to formal science and researchers who believe that only scientific conservation approaches are a solution to the environmental problems in Zimbabwe (see also Moyo et al 1991; Nhira and Fortmann, 1993; Mukamuri 1995a; Hill and Katerere n.y; ZIDD 1999) – in the form of land degradation, deforestation, overgrazing, inequalities in resource distribution in the country, and management of wildlife, among others. For example, gross inequities with respect to distribution of and access to key life supporting resources can undermine conservation efforts. As Hill and Katerere (n.y: 253) observe, in many parts of Zimbabwe, inequity in the distribution of and access to land contributed to resource scarcity, which ultimately undermined livelihood security and conservation of resources as people forced into communal areas had no alternative except to encroach into state conservation areas, thereby causing an environmental problems in the country.

In the face of environmental problems in Zimbabwe, the story of *harurwa* in Norumedzo Communal Area poses several questions. First, how do peoples' interactions with *harurwa* challenge the philosophy of nature as practiced (or enacted into being) by the state in Zimbabwe? And second, in what senses are *harurwa* insects actors in different sectors of society? Such questions are similar to Mignolo's (2000) critical questioning of Western modernity that opens ways to rethink relations when he asks: "How can theory be subsumed into the project of modernity/coloniality and decolonisation? Or would this subsumption perhaps suggest the need to abandon the twentieth century formulations of a critical-theory project? Or, would it suggest the exhaustion of the project of modernity?" These are questions that can also be raised around conservation contestations in a situation such as that of Zimbabwe and other such areas where conservation has become a topical and contested subject among people who share different epistemological ideologies.

In the Zimbabwean context, while some conservationists (especially most of the traditional leaders in the Norumedzo Communal Area I interacted with during fieldwork) in the

circles of conservation management advocate for the deployment of local practices and exclusion of expert science in conservation projects (see also Masaka 2011), some conservation scientists as exemplified in ZNEPS (2009) counter this by arguing for the exclusion of local practices of conservation projects (see Aylen 1941; Bowyer-Bower 1996). Elsewhere, scholars like Law (1987), Vayda and Walter (1999), for example, have regarded the interface between natural and social systems, yet others like McKibben (1999) believe this would result in disharmony – “the end of nature” whereby parts of nature will be modified or invaded by human action. Such contrary positions have made it difficult to provide a solution on how nature and culture, and therefore science and indigenous epistemology, should relate. It is in view of such difficulties that conservation problems in Zimbabwe, as in many parts of the world, have been a cause of concern since the advent of Western scientism. In fact, Zimbabwe’s conservation problems seem to have been deepened by the enlightenment modernist thought, adopted by the country’s conservation board, that privileges a knowledge that separates nature and culture. While it is a worthwhile endeavour to rethink the relationship between nature and culture in view of environmental problems such as that of Zimbabwe, the challenge is how this rethinking could be done in a way that promotes sustainability.

Arguing in view of discussions pervasive on knowledge studies in various disciplines such as conservation sciences and Environmental Anthropology, Green argues for commensurability of diverse epistemologies. Green (2008: 150) is of the view that “the opposition between endogenous epistemologies and Science is neither a necessary one nor even an historical one”. Instead, she argues for rethinking ontologies, especially the rethinking of the ontologies of modernity as the basis of framing the possibilities for commensurability. Other scholars such as Mario Blaser (2013) argue for “the ontological differences’ which *he think* is ‘missing in social sciences such as anthropology thus producing the conditions of possibility for disavowing ontological conflicts – conflicts about what is there and how they constitute realities in power-charged fields” (p. 548-49, emphasis added). Blaser, thus, would argue in relation to environmental conservation and knowledge studies that the absence of ontological conflicts in many social science disciplines such as Anthropology rules out the “possibility of multiple ontologies” (Blaser 2013: 549). Yet surfacing such multiple ontologies and ontological conflicts (such as a conflict between different realities) is critical in challenging Western modernity and its hegemonist scientific culture which seem to be almost definitive of our times (see also Asad 1973; Mafeje 1976; Leach, Scoones, and Wynne 2005; Blaser 2013; see also Mukamuri 1995a; Mawere 2012; Mapara 2009): it is also important to deal with environmental problems that haunt

many countries the world-over. Here, it is worthwhile to make reference to Norumedzo, which is the case study for this work.

In the protection of *jiri* in Norumedzo, I observed that people worked productively with differing approaches. While traditional leadership is in the forefront of all conservation issues to do with the *jiri*, the leadership also works hand in hand with the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) – a government agency responsible for environmental management in Zimbabwe, especially in the rural areas. During the time of my fieldwork in Norumedzo, there were two members of EMA who, though were local members, had been trained and tasked by EMA to assist in the management of forest in the Norumedzo, including the *jiri*. These EMA members (commonly known as *Vanajengetavhu*/Environment Conservation Monitors) collaborated with traditional leadership, the *harurwa* caretaking team and the locals to protect the *jiri*. During the *harurwa* season, every morning one of the *Jengetavhu* would come to work with the *harurwa* caretaking team in the *jiri*. In the *jiri*, the *Vanajengetavhu* collaborate with the *harurwa* administrators and *harurwa* policemen, helping controlling activities in the *jiri* such as harvesting.

The example of the Norumedzo *Jiri* where traditional leadership is working together with EMA's representatives – the Environment Conservation Monitors – could suggest that diverse epistemologies can, in many ways, meet and enrich each other. While traditional leadership bases its knowledge on daily practices adopted from previous generations, the Environment Conservation Monitors (ECMs) bases its knowledge on scientific conservation approach. In fact the ECMs unlike traditional leadership, *harurwa* administrators, and *harurwa* policemen were trained in conservation sciences by EMA. Thus, in the face of the asymmetrical relations between science and indigenous epistemologies at national level (as exemplified by ZNEPS which largely employ scientific conservation methodologies in national conservation issues), humans and other beings in their interactions, the Norumedzo case offers a window of possibility for multiple conservation knowledges and a dialogue between science and other knowledge forms or what Jose David Saldivar (1997) calls “critical border thinking” (Mignolo 2000; Grosfoguel 2008: 16). Critical border thinking is the epistemic response of the subaltern to the Eurocentric project of modernity, science included by subsuming/redefining the emancipatory rhetoric of modernity (imposed on subaltern by the European imperialists) from the cosmologies of the subaltern, located in the oppressed and exploited side of the colonial difference (Grosfoguel 2008: 16). In other words, critical border thinking is a perspective that is critical of possible knowledge forms in terms of what they offer and how what they offer can help to improve inter- and intra-relations between humans and other beings in the world they

share. When applied to conservation, critical border thinking suggests that the debates in conservational sciences and environmental management should be reframed. Reframing implies a thorough re-evaluation of the existing approaches in environment conservation and challenging them (where necessary) by suggesting new approaches as responses to the problems being faced in conservation. I have already challenged the current conservation approaches in Zimbabwe by arguing that either science or indigenous epistemologies alone cannot solve environment conservational problems of this millennium unless they collaborate and enrich or complement each other. What is needed, therefore, is a holistic comprehensive approach – an approach that challenges the founding dualisms such as Eurocentric science and subaltern epistemologies and constructively addresses and reconciles understandings of contending approaches in the science/subaltern epistemologies, scientist/traditionalist and nature/culture binaries by offering space for diverse conservation knowledges and methodologies that complement one another, or at least coexist and acknowledge the existence of the other. Such an approach mirrors the kind of conservation, or rather forestry protection, in some rural communities in Zimbabwe such as the Norumedzo.

There is a cobweb of relations between humans and other beings such as plants and insects in the Norumedzo *jiri* with each actant benefitting from the other. In the light of this observation and the apparent successes of conservation in the *jiri*, I suggest that conservation in Zimbabwe and beyond explores and debates the value of some key variants of a post-humanities approach – a post-humanities perspective which seeks to move beyond modernistic nature/culture and science/indigenous epistemological dualisms, or mere reproduction of established forms and methods of disciplinary knowledge, by trying to rethink the ontologies of modernity present in its core oppositions: nature-culture; belief-knowledge; science-indigenous epistemology and subject-object. In fact, such a reinvigorated/enhanced kind of post-humanities approach together with my proposed engagement zones perspective explicated in the introduction of this dissertation is the one that promotes ‘sustainable’ social relations between humans and other beings in environmental conservation but without humans sacrificing their human dignity and human essence; it is the kind of post-humanities that could render itself more nuanced, applicable and embraced in some African contexts such as the Norumedzo. This is because such a post-humanities approach simply promotes sustainable social relations between humans and other beings but without each modifying the essence of those involved in the relationship. No wonder I emphasised in the introduction of this dissertation that though I find literature coming through post-humanities fascinating, this work does not legitimise post-humanism but tests its key aspects (as enunciated by post-humanities scholars like Wolfe and

Haraway) and enhances the perspective with those aspects it may have not taken aboard so as to render it more nuanced.

Like Haraway and Wolfe's post-humanities, this work does not advance an approach that proposes the notion of a separate environment that needs protection from humans. Rather, basing on an enhanced post-humanities perspective (I have explained in the introduction of this thesis) and on what I have gathered in the field, it advances a perspective that considers the environment as a whole with different actors that are regulated by institutions – formal or informal – and relate in such a way that do not threaten/undermine the essence of humanity or that of other beings. I find the approach that proposes the notion of a separate environment that needs protection only from humans as ironic in a sense. It is ironic because the very notion of environmental protection it proposes is based on a notion of a separate environment needing protection from humans only. In fact, a perspective (that considers the notion of environment as a separate entity) falls short as it fails to explain relationships in environments such as that of Norumedzo. As such, in this dissertation and based on my fieldwork, I am working towards reframing the debate on conservation in terms that emphasise collectivity and coexistence. In fact, basing on the *jiri* conservation practices with which entities such as insects-*harurwa*, *mbondoro*/ancestral lions), *masvikiro*/spirit mediums, *vadzimu*/ancestors, humans and other players participate, relate, interact, and benefit from each other, I should underscore that I find the notion of an environment that needs protection from human beings alone problematic. Stressing the participation of beings such as *mbondoro* in issues of the environment (among others), Bourdillon (1987) observed that *mbondoro* spirit is a revered Shona territorial spirit that is believed to have dominion over a very big area and whose anger can result in misfortune or even death of the perpetrators – those who upset the environment. This is echoed by Pollard and Cousins (2014: 234 emphasis mine) who note that “traditional Shona religion, still strong today *especially in the rural areas*, centres on the belief in a supreme being who is approached through a hierarchy of ancestral spirits called *mbondoro* whose ‘districts and provinces’ are concerned with the care and management of the earth and community well-being”. It is, therefore, this wholesome post-humanities approach to conservation that this dissertation advances. The approach seems to be absent in post-independent Zimbabwe's national environmental policy which, in fact, separates environment from the people.

As explained above, my post-humanities approach here considers humans, other beings and the state as a collective whole and as interdependent partners/members of the universe they share, although humans are at the centre. In this case, all entities that are found in the

environment, forest insects included, should be considered as important players in conservation. As this is central to the protection of the Norumedzo *Jiri*, an appropriate and productive way of re-engaging African environmental philosophy is one that does not impose the dualisms of Western modernity. As Wolfe (2010) argues, a vibrant, rigorous post-humanism is vital for addressing questions of ethics and justice, language and trans-species communication, social systems and the intellectual aspirations of interdisciplinarity. Rolland-Pieque (2010) in his review of Wolfe's book, "What is posthumanism?", also confirms the holistic, viability and practicality of a post-humanities approach by arguing that post-humanism [or post-humanities theory] involves the coming together as a whole of humans and non-humans in the material-semiotic networks or in the web of relationships that undermine the classical distinctions between self and other, mind and body, society and nature, organic and technological; it is not an exploration of the post-human (see for example, Hayles) or the transhuman, but an embodied critique of philosophical, ethical, and/or metaphysical versions of humanism.

Given that the post-humanities approach I advance in this dissertation is that which acknowledges connections and relationships between humans and other beings (living or nonliving) but without undermining human dignity and the essence of humanity (as well as that of other beings), it could contribute to establishing mutual relationships between humans and other beings who are players in environmental issues. It could also encourage 'a generative dialogue' between Euro-American science and other forms of knowledge, such as indigenous or locally informed environmental conservation practices. This is important as there are conservational practices/methodologies used in some rural communities in Zimbabwe (as is the case of Norumedzo) that have proven successful in protecting forests and conserving the environment in general. The extrapolation of a philosophy of *chivanbu* – a philosophy of life of a particular people that emphasises societally acceptable ways of human conduct – to issues of environment conservation in the Norumedzo Communal Area, thus, is a case in point. *Chivanbu* is way of life of a particular people (in this case of the Varumedzo) with codes, norms and values embedded in it such as love, harmony and peace with each other and the environment as a whole (see also Chivaura 2006). This is what Lien and Law (2010: 5) allude to when they argue that "through attention to practices and performativity, we may contribute to an anthropology which is more sensitive to relations between humans and other living beings than is possible in a more anthropocentric approach." Lack of a 'sustainable dialogue' between science and endogenous epistemologies, humans and other beings seems to have been prompted by the idea that humans are superior to other beings in the universe they share. This has been noted by Fairbanks (2010) who argues that until recently, Western virtue ethics has never recognised nature-focused virtues.

This failure by the West to recognise nature-focused virtues is not surprising given that Western philosophies and religions have promoted the ideas that humans are superior to nature, and that there are no moral principles regulating our relationship to nature. Yet “this anthropocentric approach emphasises particular qualities of the human-animal phenomena on the basis of relations of asymmetry marked by animal subordination. Put differently, the anthropocentric approach separates ‘culture’ (human) and ‘nature’ (other beings) on the basis of unequal distribution of agency” (Lien and Law 2010:10).

It is in this light that the present research challenges (using an enhanced post-humanities theory and my engagement zones perspective) the asymmetrical relations between science and endogenous epistemologies by suggesting “responsible empiricism that enables contestations over sciences to enter into public debate” (Green 2011: 6), and humans to acknowledge the importance of other beings in conservation. On the same note, the research examines the central tenets of modernity and humanism by challenging asymmetrical relations between humans and other beings, and instead suggests an approach that respects human/other beings interactions and promotes open dialogue between different forms of knowledge. The approach advances Haraway’s (2007) argument on the need to recognise the interdependence and relationships between humans and other beings [such as animals] who for her are companions to humans. Haraway (2006: 102) in her *Encounters with Companion Species*, for example, points out that the biological term ‘species’ is also related etymologically to *respecere*, to look with respect, to behold, to notice, to pay attention to: “polite greeting, to constituting the polis, where and when species meet”. Perhaps the biggest challenge with this approach is how different species should relate to each other without undermining the essence and ‘dignity’ of the other. In the Norumedzo, where data for this research was collected, the locals are socially connected to other species (*zvisikwa*), but in an ordered hierarchy that encourages mutual consideration of the other. This study, thus, at the end advances an energised version of Stenger’s (2005) ‘cosmopolitics’ – a politics constituted by multiple, divergent worlds whereby indigenous movements may meet scientists and environmentalists of different stripes and where the interrelations between ‘humans’ and ‘other beings’ is seriously considered. Such an approach has the merit of allowing the interface of science with other knowledge forms, while at the same time enhancing the interactions/relations between the ‘state’, ‘humans’ and ‘other beings’ that moves beyond the nature/culture divide (at least in a productive sense).

Challenging conservation in Zimbabwe

Since this study focuses on environmental conservation in south-eastern Zimbabwe, it is important to present an overview of studies concerning the subject with particular reference to Zimbabwe. I have argued in the section above that to the extent that social relations in the Norumedzo involve different participants – humans and other beings such as *mbondoro*/lion ancestors, *vadzimu*/ancestors, plants and insects (*harurwa* in particular) – conservation in rural communities emphasises co-existence and is all encompassing. As I highlighted in the introduction of this dissertation, studies on conservation in Zimbabwe, however, emphasise the opposite – that conservation is executed solely by humans – chiefly because of National Environmental Conservationists’ bias towards Western science and conservation strategies which rely heavily on the dichotomies of nature and culture and also exclude all other strategies that are based on “traditional”/local daily practices. Though I pursued this argument in detail in the introduction of this dissertation, it suffices to emphasise that the biases towards Western based conservation strategies or formal science are exemplified in the National Environment Policy and Strategies (ZNEPS), which, besides drawing on Western science and conservation strategies, is discriminatory of other actors in the environment. To this effect, I have quoted ZNEPS (2009: 7) which states: “At species level, the country supports an estimated 4,440 vascular plant species, 196 mammal species, 672 bird species, 156 reptile species, 57 species of amphibians, 132 fish species and uncounted numbers of species in other groups. The diversity of microorganisms in particular is extremely poorly known”. The current environment policy of Zimbabwe, therefore, has no specific clause that provides for the protection of forest insects [like bees and *harurwa*] and other such species which are also important actors in environment conservation. As is apparent from the quotation above, insect species are not well recognised in Zimbabwe’s environmental policy despite the contribution that most of these insects make to human livelihoods and the ecosystems as a whole. We can only assume that insects (such as bees and *harurwa*), together with other small organisms are those being referred to as “uncounted species in other groups” (ZNEPS 2009: 7). One could therefore realise that based on Western science, as it is, ZNEPS accedes that some fauna and flora are clearly more equal than others. This is contrary to the conservation culture that always existed in many Southern African communities (such as Norumedzo) especially before the advent of colonialism (cf. Marongwe 2004). The referred conservation culture acknowledged the moral value and rights of all entities in the environment. In fact for conservation as traditionally practised in the Southern African context without reference to externally led interventions, all fauna and flora have value in themselves

such that they should be accorded the right for a ‘fair’ treatment by human beings. Arguing in more or less the same way, Eduardo Galeano (2008), says of Ecuador:

Nature still has much to say and it is high time we, its children, stopped playing deaf. And maybe even God will hear the call coming from this Andean country – Ecuador – and add the eleventh commandment forgotten in the instructions given to us from Mount Sinai, “Thou shalt love Nature, of which thou art part” (cited in Acosta, 2010: 7).

Galeano’s thinking, though in reference to Ecuador, is also applicable to Zimbabwe. It relates with comments I heard from many Norumedzo villagers during my fieldwork. One villager, a headman, remarked: “*Isu vanhu tingoriwo zvisikwa sezvimwe zvinhu zvose. Saka zvimwe zvisikwa kusanganisira miti nembuka zvinodawo kuremekedzwa nekubatwa zvakanaka sezvatinodawo isu vanhu*/We, humans, are part of nature and nature is part of us. And so, nature needs respect and fair treatment in as much as we, humans do.” Thus, while management of the environment by the rural communities in many parts of the country was informed by the ‘locals’ practices, the experience that Zimbabweans went through since the dawn of colonialism has led them to despise their own conservation practices, and to deny the value as well as rights they accorded all other beings. As explained above, this denial of value and rights to other beings is explicit in the current national environment policy and strategies of Zimbabwe. Unlike countries such as Ecuador that in 2008 ratified a new constitution which recognises the inalienable and fundamental rights of nature (making it the first country to do this), Zimbabwe has failed to resist founding dualisms (i.e. science/indigenous knowledge and nature/culture divides) by perpetuating the denigration of daily conservation practices and disrespect of other beings through its national environmental policy. This is in spite of the fact that in some cases, such as in the Norumedzo *Jiri*, other beings such as *harurwa* and *mbondoro* (among others) participate in conservation. This perspective poses a challenge to conservation as practised by national environment conservationists; as the study of conservation in the *jiri* challenges national conservationists to rethink their conservation methodologies/practices.

I should underline that in this chapter, I discussed literature on forest insects, *harurwa*, humans, and other beings interactions in the protection of the *jiri* with a view to unravel, understand and interpret the different perspectives from which they have been conceptualised and dealt with in academic and conservation literature. More significantly, I intended to contribute new insights on how modernistic dualisms could be rethought and new perspectives that advance understanding of environmental conservation in rural communities could be generated. The purpose of this chapter, thus, was manifold: inter alia, to unravel the complex

nuances and subtleties between humans, insects, forests and the state; to examine the social networks and interrelationships between humans and *harurwa*; to show the gaps in literature on insects studies and; to highlight how these gaps can be filled in. I drew on a network theoretical approach and epistemological position of this work to provide an analysis of literature that is critical in order to be able to meaningfully discuss and unravel the complex relations, networks and interactions in the Norumedzo Communal Area. I conclude that though most African governments (e.g that of Zimbabwe) have adopted national conservation projects that are biased towards Western science and conservation strategies, given the social networks, relations and interactions in the *jiri* and the Norumedzo Communal Area at large, there is need to rethink conservation by government, and to recognise, develop and employ other methods that are based on local daily practices.

In the next chapter, I examine the centrality of personhood as understood from the Varumedzo's worldview. I especially examine how personhood relates with different stories about *harurwa* origins and informs as well as influences the kind of conservation and resource management Varumedzo engage in, as well as their 'network' based interactions with the world around them.

CHAPTER 3

Personhood, Stories on *Harurwa* Origins and Social Networks: Relationalities and Conservation Practices in the Norumedzo

Introduction

“All stories that recount history are complex, messy, and intensely political. They ebb and flow over time within oral traditions and in people’s minds. Such stories move and change according to those ‘*men*’ who are doing the remembering and why they are telling the story. When people recount a history, they choose what to tell and how to tell it, including and excluding information based on their preferences and intentions” (Braudel 1980: 27).

Fernand Braudel’s observation that when people recount a history (or do research), they choose what to tell and how to tell it (or what to research and how to research it). He makes the claim that there are possibilities for composite truths and complexities on any subject of research depending on one’s preferences, orientation and motivation. The observation is germane to my ethnographic fieldwork in Norumedzo where people chose events and notions that they wished to convey to me.

This chapter picks up from my discussion of posthumanities (in the introduction) to link it with issues around personhood and the origins of *harurwa* in Norumedzo from the lenses of the network theory of relational ontology. The discusses one of the multiple conceptions of personhood – that of the Varumedzo – and different accounts about the origins of *harurwa*, to show how these influence relations, networking and conservation practices in Norumedzo. This is critical given that “many communities have social, moral and ontological outlooks richly expressed in oral, visual or ceremonial forms” Connell 2007: xii). Also, in discussing the multiple conceptions of personhood and *harurwa*, not only the multiple nuances and voices or perspectives of people from the villages within Norumedzo are heard, but also those from other contexts. Besides, by including multiple positioned voices and perspectives, I attempt to elaborate multiple subject positions without assuming that one version of those perspectives take precedence over another.

Ethnographic accounts of personhood in Norumedzo Communal Area

The question of personhood is, however, not peculiar to Africa and in particular Norumedzo. In the Western world, the question of what a person is exactly has attracted much controversy since antiquity. One of the best known answers to the question is perhaps from the modern French philosopher, Rene Descartes (1591-1650) who argued that a person is a combination of two radically different substances namely matter/body – which is extended in space and mind – it does not occupy space and thinking is its essential feature. Since it was espoused, Descartes' theory of personhood has generated controversies of epic proportions, particularly on how we can account for the interaction between these two radically different substances (body and mind) and how we can be sure of other bodies we meet being inhabited by minds (see also Teffo & Roux 2002). In view of these problems associated with Descartes' theory – problems which Descartes' theory could not provide answers –, the theory has been rejected by many scholars, especially African scholars or those writing from Africa such as Kwame Gyekye (1987), Ifeanyi A. Menkiti (1984) and Kwasi Wiredu (1992), among others. These scholars note that Descartes' conception of personhood cannot be applied universally to other contexts such as Africa.

Yet, even as given by these African scholars, the African traditional conceptions of personhood, though central to a range of African philosophies of knowledge, vary in many respects from that of Western enlightenment thought (Menkiti 2000; Mawere 2011b; Teffo and Roux 2002). Even the conception of personhood in Africa per se is not homogeneous as it varies from place to place, that is, it has multiple realisations in different places. While there are differences in African and Western understandings of personhood, there are overlaps in so far as similarities also exist. In my analysis of personhood in this study, I focus on the conception of personhood by the Varumedzo/Norumedzo people.

Chief Norumedzo, for example, recounted the following when I asked him in May 2012 why and how resource conservation in Norumedzo began: “*Haungagoni kunzwisisa kuchengetedzwa kwenbharanda nezvivanikwa muno umu kana usati wanzwisisa kuti chatinoti munhu chimbori chii uye nboroondo yeharurwa muno muNorumedzo*”/lit: You are not going to understand resource conservation unless you understand our understanding of personhood and the stories on the origins of *harurwa* in this area”. In another interview, Mr Mabhodho who is a village head in the Norumedzo Communal Area shared similar views:

A person is a person if he or she can live in harmony not only with other people but also with other beings. We can only have a peaceful world if there is between humans themselves and humans and other

beings (zvimwe zvisikwa). This is what we (the Varumedzo) try to do since the time of our forefather, Nemeso. I grew up here and my parents used to teach me not only to respect humans but other beings as well. This is a way of life that has always allowed our jiri and harurwa here to flourish. Had not this way of life, I believe we could not talk of the jiri and harurwa today. So for me, a person is a person as long as he/she can live at harmony not only with other humans but also with other beings.

Other informants such as Sekuru Toreva told me, “*muno muNorumedzo tinogara nekuchengetedza masango edu kubudikidza nemanzwisisire edu echatinoti munhu/* here in the Norumedzo, we get the ideas of how to live, protect and interact with our forests in this area from our understanding of what a person is.” Others like Mbuya Tagara said, “*tinogara nekuchengetedza masango edu kuburikidza nenhoroondo dzematangiro akaita harurwa muno muNorumedzo/*we live and protect our forests through the stories about the origins of *harurwa* here in the Norumedzo”. It is from such experiences and observations that I started gathering data on personhood and accounts on *harurwa* origins in the Norumedzo. Starting on the former (personhood), I realised that examining how personhood influences resource conservation and management practices, relationships, as well as social networks in the Norumedzo is important for this study. In fact given the potential of meaningful interaction, where the conception of personhood is clearly understood it empowers researchers through levelling knowledge gaps among researchers on environment conservation and management.

From my engagement and interactions during fieldwork, I observed that community management of forests in the Norumedzo is largely inspired by the Varumedzo’s conception of personhood vis-avi-vis their relations with other beings (besides that it also depend on *harurwa* historical accounts as I will show later in this chapter). Also, I realised that the conception of personhood in Norumedzo is multifaceted and contains several intrinsic characteristics. For example, a person is made up of numerous components; a person has an active moral component; and a person has components synchronised between the physical and metaphysical bodies such as life principle, blood principle and personality principle (see also Wiredu 1996; Njirayamanda Kaphagawami cited in Wiredu 2004; Mawere 2011b). The conception of personhood by the Varumedzo is in fact complex as will be demonstrated by data presented in the ensuing paragraphs. This complex conception of personhood is described in the Bantu-African word for person, *muntu* (*munhu* in Shona and Varumedzo dialect) as a set of relationships and a system of systems – an entity inhabited by *mweya*¹⁰ (what can also be translated to mean

¹⁰ In the Norumedzo cosmology as with many other groupings in Zimbabwe, *mweya* can be understood as the natural phenomenon of wind that blows and sometimes may result in rain falling or as soul that inhabits the body of

force *vitale*) of a deceased human being (see also Mawere 2011b). For the Varumedzo, as for Fu-Kiau (2001: 42), “*muntu* is a principle of principles such that *muntu* is able to produce materially or technologically other mechanical systems”. *Munhu* (*vanhu* in plural) is considered to manifest in different forms and ways. I was informed by my informants in Norumedzo that *munhu* can manifest, for example, as a *mbondoro* (ancestral lion/ancestral leopard), *njuzu* (mermaid/half fish and half human entities), *svikiro* (spirit medium) or *mbepo* (wind or soul) such that it becomes wrong to characterise *munhu* in terms of physical characteristics (about issues of *svikiro* and *njuzu* see also Ranger 1999; and McGregor 2003 respectively; see also Fontein 2004).

Of interest to note here is my conversation with Chief Norumedzo. “So how is *munhu* distinguished from *zvisikwa* (other beings)?” I asked. “*Munhu* is distinguished from *zvisikwa* found in the realm of existence by *njere* (intelligence) and a unique quality of humanness (*unhu/ubuntu*), besides the *mutumbi/muviri* (physical body) we see”. He answered. “Well, thank you but where does the issue of *mweya* come in here?” I followed up my question. “*Mweya* and *njere* are closely related for it is from the former that the latter ensue. This is why we say the dead can still think. It is because when the body of a *munhu* dies the *mweya* doesn’t die”. This understanding was shared by many other Varumedzo. Mbuya Zvareva, for example, had this to say: “The *mweya* of a *munhu* though can interact with many other beings is different from that of plants and animals in that it doesn’t die. That’s why our elders say *munhu haarovi* (*munhu* doesn’t die forever)”. “In fact for us, Varumedzo, *munhu* through *njere* and *unhu* and the *muviri* is able to interact with the local community before and even after death of the physical body. For this reason, the dead in Norumedzo are not considered as really dead. They are *vafi-vapenyu* (living-dead) who just passed on to another world, but can still come back and interact with the *vapenyu* (the living) in the physical world”, added Mbuya Zvareva. This means the Varumedzo’s conception of and emphasis on personhood focuses on accommodation and conviviality as well as composite and multiple identities.

After my conversation with Chief Norumedzo and Mbuya Zvareva, I became yet more curious to understand Varumedzo’s conception of personhood. I began to track when people used the ideas of “*munhu*” and “*zvisikwa*”. The phrase “*zvisikwa*” is explored in the introduction of this dissertation, hence my focus on *munhu* in this chapter. Chief Norumedzo’s words in the above conversation with me marked the beginning of my own “disconcertment” (to use Helen

a human being or even other physical entities such as trees, mountains etc. While *mweya* conceptualised either way is always fluid, in this dissertation *mweya* understood as that which inhabits the body is prioritised.

Verran's 2003 term for ethnographic insights that make one realise his/her own thinking is not the only way of knowing). Chief Norumedzo and other Varumedzo's conception of personhood reverberated with my philosophical study of the same. It revealed a number of differences and similarities with the Western conception of personhood especially since enlightenment, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter. This resonated with the anthropologist, Tim Ingold's (2007) endeavour to rethink knowledge in ways that escape representation in a Cartesian framework of dualisms. It also echoed anthropologist Michael Jackson's (2009) call for an anthropology that engages the philosophy that is in the everyday – an anthropology, I understand, should be grounded in the local people's way of life.

Varumedzo's local conception of personhood is in many ways at odds with other conceptions of personhood elsewhere (for example by Cartesian scholars such as Rene Descartes). The starting point for an account of personhood for the Varumedzo is the social, as opposed to that in Western philosophy where the starting point is usually the epistemological and psychological (see also Teffo and Roux 2002). Also, a person is more than the physical body as it includes *njere* and *mweya* to allow interactions with both living/nonliving and other beings that can hardly be characterised as humans or nonhumans such as *njuzu*. From my observations during fieldwork, I noted that for the Varumedzo, interactions and relations are neither for the physical bodies we can perceive with our senses nor humans alone, but for both the physical and the immaterial, whether humans or other beings. This is because there is coordination between the *mweya* (endowed with humanness), *njere* (endowed with intelligence) and *muwiri* (the body with blood). This connotes that for the Varumedzo, the dual force *vitale*/soul-mind (*mweya-njere* in Norumedzo and the Shona metaphysics in general) and the ability to relate with other beings (humans or otherwise – material or immaterial) makes a person distinct to such other beings as animals and plants. “But this does not mean that only *vanhu* with *mweya-njere* participate in conservation practices in the *jiri*”, said one of the elderly Varumedzo, Sekuru Takura. In fact, there is recognition of the existence of other kinds of beings that partake in conservation of the environment and, in particular, protection of the *jiri*. Such beings include *mbondoro* and *njuzu* which can be understood as living-dead persons (ancestors) manifesting themselves in other beings, and are also considered to partake in matters of the environment conservation (about issues of *njuzu* and *mbondoro* see Magwa 1991; Ranger and Alexander 1998; McGregor 2004, 2006; Marongwe 2004). Though stories about *njuzu* and *mbondoro* are widespread in the Norumedzo as elsewhere in Zimbabwe, and their manifestations considered a reality by the Varumedzo, such manifestations of beings as *njuzu* and *mbondoro* have been categorised as mere beliefs and not knowledge by expert/formal scientists (see also Bourdillon 1976; Chavunduka

1972) who believe that formal science is the only way of knowing. Yet for scholars such as Latour (2010), such modernist categorisation between knowledge and belief is problematic as it blurs understanding and silences other possible ways of knowing. For this reason, Latour, thus, resists any reduction of one (either knowledge or belief) to the other.

While it is recognised that not only *vanhu* with *mweya* are the sole actors in conservation practices in the *jiri*, it is worthwhile emphasising that for the Varumedzo, *vanhu* are at the centre of conservation practices and relationships in the *jiri*. Using dual *mweya-njere*, *vanhu* are expected by other *vanhu* in their community to employ *unhu/ubuntu* – a philosophy of humanness that emphasises unity, peace and togetherness – in all their interactions and relations with other beings or actants in the universe they share. This is not to say that the Varumedzo’s conception of personhood entails that humans are equal to all other beings in the strict sense of the term; ‘equal as beings’ in Norumedzo are understood to exist in hierarchy. Yet, though beings (according to the Varumedzo) relate hierarchically with *Mwari/Musiki* (God/Creator), *mbondoro* (ancestral lion or senior ancestor), and *svikiro* (spirit medium) at the top in that order, it is difficult to put entities/things in hierarchies in the same way some Western classical scholars such as Aristotle did in his famous *Scala naturae* (ladder of nature) where he identifies three levels of life namely nutritional/vegetative (plant life with powers of reproduction), animal (with powers of sensation including those of the lower levels) and human lives (intellectual powers including those of the lower levels). This is because from an Aristotelian view, since human life is at the highest level, it follows that “there is more to life in man than in a dog, in a dog than in a worm, in a worm than in a plant, and in a plant than in a stone” (O’Connor 1985: 53). From an Aristotelian view, humans thus are at the top of all entities (*zvisikwa* according to the Norumedzo people), followed by animals, plants and stones. Such a *Scala de naturae* (as Aristotle puts it) does not fit in the Norumedzo schema and conception of personhood because for the Varumedzo *Mwari* and not *munhu* is at the top. Besides, in Norumedzo other beings such as *mbondoro* or *svikiro* are above *munhu* in terms of hierarchy, and can temporarily inhabit trees (or stones etc) which makes it difficult to classify the tree as a mere plant (at least that moment the *mbondoro/svikiro* inhabits the tree). From this understanding of *munhu*, it can be argued that the Varumedzo go beyond Aristotle’s maxim that human beings are *zoon politikon*/political animals. To the Varumedzo, a *munhu* is already social at conception, for the union of *mweya-njere* already defines a social identity: *munhu* is not only political but also social. Making this understanding clearer, Chief Norumedzo had this to say during one of my interviews with him:

Munhu, *the way we understand him/her here, is not just the mviri/physical body you see. There is more to munhu than the so-called mviri as the former also possesses mweya and njere. This is why mudzimu (ancestor) can manifest himself as a mhondoro, njuzu, svikiro or what vanhu might think is mere wind (mweya/mhepo). For us here, munhu is a munhu if and only if one demonstrates intelligence above that of 'other beings' (zvisikwa) such as plants and mhuka (low order animals), and above all demonstrates a sense of unhu (humanness). Unhu is the munhu's ability to interact peacefully and in a morally and socially 'acceptable' manner with members of the same specie and other beings. If a munhu, therefore, fails to live to the expectations of the society to the extent that he/she cannot live at peace with other beings, for us, s/he ceases to be a munhu. In Shona we may call him a dog (imbwa), fool (benzi) and so on depending on the character that he is manifesting. Munhu thus may have a mviri of a munhu, yes, but the njere encased in that mviri and automatically the unhu (humanness) falls below that of vanhu. Such cannot be considered a munhu but something else different and no one desires this to happen to him/her* (Interview with Chief Norumedzo, June 2012).

It could be deduced from the Chief's words and my conversations with other Varumedzo that this understanding of personhood informs the Varumedzo's conservation practices to the extent that they respect and consider relations with other beings like plants (because they are sometimes inhabited by ancestors besides that they are *harurwa's* habitat) and *harurwa* (because human relations with them motivate protection of the *jiri* and *harurwa* are also a source of livelihood) (see also Ranger 1998; MacGregor 2003; Fontein 2004, 2006).

Also, from my conversation with the Varumedzo and Chief Norumedzo's vignette above, it is clear that personhood in the Norumedzo is also conceived as a process acquired or lost through time based on one's ability to fulfill obligations (to oneself, *vanhu*, and other beings) and in his/her relations or social interactions with other beings in the society in which every *munhu* is part. For the Varumedzo (as with many other social groupings in Zimbabwe), a *munhu* who does not use his/her *mweya-njere* for the good of other community members, or at least who does not live to the expectations of the society in which s/he is part, can be considered a dog/*imbwa* or donkey/*dhongi* (terms that are derogatory and diminishing). They, then, cannot be expected to participate at the level of *vanhu* in resource management in the area. To this *munhu*, Varumedzo ask: "Uri dhongi here kana kuti uri imbwa?/Are you a donkey or a dog?" This question is ethically and practically relevant to everyday sociality and relationality on the Norumedzo. Since losing one's personhood (for example to the status of *imbwa* or *dhongi*) is considered undesirable, as it means losing social ties with and respect from other *vanhu*, it can be inferred that the resource conservation and management, as well as social interactions in the Norumedzo, are premised on the locals' conception of personhood which is multifaceted. Personhood in this sense is multifaceted in that it can be understood as a process and also as a composite of

muwiri/body (material), *mweya/mbepo* (soul/spiritual/immaterial) and *njere* (intelligence). As *mweya/mbepo* is believed to be the one directly connected to *njere* (which other beings such as dogs and donkeys do not possess), it endows *munhu* with the ability to imagine, reason, and feel for others or to deploy *unhu/ubuntu* – a philosophy of humanness – in the interaction with other *vanhu* and other beings. Yet there remains the possibility that one can be a *munhu* but also lack those qualities of *munhu* such as *unhu* in “one’s thoughts or one’s consciousness or *hiyakemniki*, in the Palikur” (Green 2013: 22). In this sense, the response that negates “No, I am neither a donkey nor a dog” says “My consciousness is that of a *munhu* with *mweya-njere*: I am not a *munhu* either lacking or incapable of using my *mweya-njere*”.

Following from the preceding discussion, the conception of *munhu* by the Varumedzo has several possible translations “which rest on alternative possible understandings of body and consciousness, place, temporality, creatureliness and obligations” (Green, *ibid*). The underlying point for all possible translations in the Norumedzo I explored above, however, indicates that the Varumedzo conception of personhood, though it may have various translations, is different from the Cartesian conception, which tends to “abstract this or that feature of the lone individual and then proceeds to make it the defining or essential characteristic which entities aspiring to the description man ‘must’ have” (Menkiti 2000:171; see also Wiredu 1992). This is to say that while the Varumedzo’s view of personhood (as many other societies that they share the same basics of culture with) denies that *vanhu* can be defined by focusing on this or that physical or psychological isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory of an individual, the Cartesian view of a person confirms this (see Teffo and Roux 2002; Mawere 2012). In the Varumedzo’s conception of personhood, the *munhu* is part of creation just like trees, animals and nature, but distinct from the aforementioned through the ability to consciously direct the energies flowing through them and to relate and interact with all other beings in one way or another. This means that the Varumedzo’s conception of personhood and respect for other beings pave way for a network of relations and interactions of all players or “actants” (including *vanhu*) in conservation practices in the *jiri*. In support of this, the Varumedzo say, “*zvinhu zrose zvakasikwa naMwari saka zvinofanira kuremekedzwa*/Everything is an offspring of God and so should be respected”. It is useful in this regard to recall that Varumedzo view *vanhu* as essentially dependent on society as a basic framework for mutual aid, for survival and relationships. This resonates with conservation strategy by post-humanities scholars who suggest that symmetrical relations of all actors in the environment must stimulate democratised relations and do away with Western enlightenment thought of nature/culture and subject/object, as well as knowledge/belief binaries (Haraway 2007; Latour 1993, 2007, 2010; Stengers 2007; De La

Cadena 2010; Visvanathan 2009). This does not, however, take away the centrality that *munbu* is accorded in the Norumedzo in terms of resource conservation and management. While the Varumedzo respect all players in the environment, the *munbu*, by virtue of him/her status as *munbu* with *mweya-njere*, is always at the centre of the environment and has the capacity to drive and steer activities that can affect other 'beings' directly or otherwise. Yet while *munbu* is at the centre of conservation and has the right to do his/her own thing, this is based upon the understanding that "ultimately one must bear the consequences of one's own choices *and actions*" (Wiredu 1996: 158, emphasis added). Harmony and peace between *vanbu* and all other *zvisikwa* is always prioritised in the Norumedzo cosmology.

In the next sections, I focus on some stories/accounts on the origins of *harurwa* and how they contribute to the Varumedzo's conception of personhood and influence relational networks and conservation practices in the Norumedzo.

The origins of *harurwa* in Norumedzo

As highlighted in the introduction of this dissertation, the origins of *harurwa* in the Norumedzo area have remained shrouded in mystery, yet the stories around the mystery have helped the Varumedzo to hold on to their conservation practices in the *jiri* for centuries now. Listening to these stories is important as it is from stories that theories are often formulated. Implications can also be drawn from the same line of thought. As Nyamnjoh (2013) argues, if we look at what scientists actually do when engaged in research, it becomes clear that: ... scientists are very much concerned with both theory and fact in much the same way anthropologists may be concerned with stories when the latter are told and considered as data. Nyamnjoh's argument resonates with Michael Kunczik's (1993) assertion that: "empirical research without a theoretical basis is just as pointless as theoretical speculation that shies away from empirical examination" (p. 39). As the adage goes, the test of the theoretical pudding is in the practical eating. This point is further echoed by Deutsch (1969: 130) who argues that, "for the intellectual health and vigour of any investigator in any field of knowledge, we need a balance between theory and data". Data can be gathered, among other means, through listening to stories by the informants or subjects that a researcher researches with. This means that, to the social scientists, theory refers to a meaningful relationship between facts, the latter of which can be generated from stories. It is from gathered facts and sometimes stories that theories are formulated. And theories themselves are critical in so far as they attempt to present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among

variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena (Kerlinger 1964: 11). Kunczik (1993: 39-40) offers a similar emphasis of the importance of theory when he says:

We shall be regarding as a hypothesis the positing of a supposed conjunction between two or more variables (phenomena). A theory can then be regarded as a system of hypotheses entwined with each other and, in themselves, internally consistent; free of contradiction. Such a theory should permit a systematic survey of individual phenomena within the field of survey. Through the specifying [sic] of relationships between the individual phenomena it should be possible logically to derive these individual phenomena and to predict their occurrence ... theories consist of a number of statements that require continual examination.

In short, Kunczik emphasises the point that theory is critical in research. As espoused by Nyamnjoh (2013), the role of theory is manifold inter-alia: It points to the gaps in our knowledge so as to make sense of what is observed; it orientates, that is, narrows the range of facts to be studied – it suggests what is worth observing in the first place, what is worth exploring through research; theory helps to conceptualise and systematise observable facts; and it predicts facts that are not yet been observed. Theory is important in research, yet it can be formulated from facts as well as stories gathered during research. Therefore, listening to multiple stories such as those to do with the origins of *harurwa* in Norumedzo is critical as well.

The stories were gathered orally and through ethnographic approaches such as storytelling, interviews, hanging around with informants, and documentary records. From all these approaches, I realised that there were two famous stories/accounts by Claudious Maredza (1985) and Pathisa Nyathi (2005), which in some way contradicted each other and also differed from the third story I gathered during fieldwork. Maredza's account is espoused in his novel titled: "*Harurwa*" (Edible stinkbugs) while Nyathi's account is based on Zimbabwe's cultural history. I should underline the importance of unpacking these stories as during my fieldwork. I observed that Varumedzo's beliefs of the stories also had a bearing in the way they related with *harurwa* and the *jiri*. As one elder villager, Mbuya vaJojo (not her real name¹¹), pointed out during fieldwork: "*Nhoroondo dzataingoudzwanwo tichikura maererano nekuuya kweharurwa munzvimbo ino iyi ingoma yomusiyanwa. Nhoroondo idzodzi dzinotibatsira kuziva kuti harurwa dzakauya sei muno munzvimbo yeNorumedzo uye kuti vakuru vedu vaidzita sei mujiri kubva kareko kuti dzisatiza munzvimbo ino iyi dzichiinda kune dzimwe nzvimbo*"/The stories we grew up hearing about the origins of *harurwa* in this

¹¹As elsewhere, names are changed. Throughout this dissertation I have used pseudonyms for most of my interlocutors except for those who chose to be identified or where after careful consideration I saw that the chances of the interlocutor to be victimised (locally or at national level) as a result of his/her participation in this research. As is required by research ethics in the social sciences, this is one way of protecting my interlocutors and ensuring their safety even some years after this research is published.

area are passed on orally from one generation to another. These stories provide us with the idea of how *harurwa* came into existence in this area (Norumedzo), and how the Varumedzo forefathers related with them in the *jiri* to make sure that *harurwa* remain thriving in the area”. It is from responses such as this, as well as many other observations, that motivated me to study the multiple versions about the origins of *harurwa* in Norumedzo. Acknowledging the existence of multiple stories about *harurwa* origins in the Norumedzo alerts us to the fact that there are different ways of seeing the world. It also saves us from the risk of privileging particular views of the world; hence the multiple versions elaborated in the sections below.

Nemeso Discovered Harurwa

This is one account given by Claude Maredza (1985) in his novel titled: *Harurwa* (Edible stinkbugs). During fieldwork, I had the privilege to meet and interview Maredza about his aforementioned novel. When I asked him why he wrote the novel, *Harurwa*, he answered: “The story about the origins of *harurwa* in Norumedzo is not captured in history books yet it is indeed a true story. It is one story that should be told to the present and future generations in Norumedzo and beyond for it not to die”. From Maredza’s response, it was clear to me that he was concerned and motivated by the silence around the story of the origins of *harurwa* in the Norumedzo, particularly in areas of study such as Cultural Studies and Anthropology. He added that “the story of *harurwa* shows how critical history and culture are as the continued existence of *harurwa* in the Norumedzo is closely linked to history and culture of the Varumedzo”.

In the novel, Maredza reports that in Chief Mazungunye’s area, a four eyed-boy by the name Nemeso was born to a young woman, Dendera. On noticing that the child was four-eyed, the matter was reported to the Chief who ordered the child to be killed on the pretext that the child was interpreted as a curse to his land. During those days in the Mazungunye area – the then Pfupajena Chieftdom, if a baby was born deformed/physically challenged or a twin, it was culturally interpreted as a curse: the baby was not allowed to live. Mid-wives were urged to strangle the baby though it was a tough task for the mid-wives to kill such babies because of the widely held belief in *ngozi* (avenging spirit) in the Shona cosmology. When Dendera learnt that her son was going to be killed soon or later, she decided to run away with the child. She went eastwards to the Norumedzo area where she stayed in the rugged Rumedzo Mountains. When Dendera and her son, Nemeso arrived in the Rumendzo Mountains, they stayed for some time before migrating to Chipinge. As reported by Maredza, it is during this time that Nemeso

discovered the insects, *harurwa*, which since then has become a delicacy for the people in south-eastern Zimbabwe (Masvingo and parts of Manicaland provinces) and beyond.

According to Maredza's account, it is Nemeso who discovered *harurwa*, and not her mother as we shall see in Nyathi's account. Though Maredza answered satisfactorily many of the questions I asked him about *harurwa* in the Norumedzo, there are no further details given in the novel by Maredza to confirm how Nemeso discovered *harurwa*. Also, while Maredza's account has some ideas that are widely acknowledged by informants in the Norumedzo area, it also has a number of points that are different from those that are recorded by Pathisa Nyathi and that I gathered during fieldwork as shall be seen in the latter versions given below; hence the multiple stories about the origins of *harurwa* in the Norumedzo.

Nemeso's mother, Mhepo, discovered harurwa

According to an account given by Pathisa Nyathi (2005), a four-eyed boy called Nyameso was born in Chief Mazungunye's area. The child's parents reported the unusual occurrence to the Chief, who thought that there was a curse on his people. The Chief immediately ordered the child to be killed. Apparently, Chief Mazungunye's cousin, Chief Mukanganwi, was against the idea of the child being killed.

On hearing that her child was to be killed, the mother of Nyameso ran away with her baby. The mother went and lived in caves on the rugged Mountain, Rumedzo. According to this legend, the mother got water from a perennial well at the foot of the mountain. The well is called Tsime raNyameso – the well of the four-eyed boy, Nyameso.

As Nyathi goes on to narrate the story of *harurwa*, one of the days while Nyameso's mother was searching for food, she saw a green insect and started feeding her child with it. The insect is what is known today as *harurwa*, which is now regarded as a delicacy in the Norumedzo area and beyond.

According to this version of the story, Nyameso's mother and not Nyameso himself discovered the insects, *harurwa*. While this account has some historical facts that are widely accepted, were confirmed by my key informants in Norumedzo, and are similar in many ways to Maredza's account, the ethnographic research I carried out in the area revealed a number of points that distinguish it from both Maredza and Nyathi's versions. This shows that there are

different ontologies and multiple versions of the stories about the origins of *harurwa* that are in circulation. Thus, the version that I offer in this dissertation is just one story.

There are some similarities between Maredza and Nyathi's accounts given above, especially that they try to explain one and the same phenomenon – the origins of *harurwa* in the Norumedzo – they differ and sometimes contradict each other. In terms of contradictions, the first account (Maredza's account) reports that it is Nemeso who discovered the insects in all the areas they (*harurwa*) exist to date (in Masvingo and Midlands), while the second (Nyathi's) says it is Nemeso's mother who discovered the insects, *harurwa*, during her food searching expeditions. Second, Maredza's account tells that the four-eyed boy was known as Nemeso while Nyathi tells us that the boy was Nyameso. This contradiction could possibly be explained linguistically given that Nyathi is a researcher of the ethnic grouping in Zimbabwe known as Ndebele, while Maredza is from the ethnic grouping known as Shona. Pronunciation of some words by people from these two groupings is different, hence the difference on the name of the four-eyed boy associated with *harurwa*. Third, while Maredza gives us the name of the mother of the four-eyed boy associated with *harurwa* as Dendera, Nyathi's account doesn't reveal the boy's mother's name. In fact, the contradictions between these two accounts on one and the same phenomenon emphasises the point I made earlier in this chapter that there are different versions of the stories about the origins of *harurwa* that are in circulation in the Norumedzo. I reiterate that acknowledging the multiple stories about *harurwa* alerts us to the fact that there are different ways of seeing the world, and saves us from the risk of privileging particular views of the world while silencing many others. It also underscores Latour's (2010) argument that the line drawn, by enlightenment modernist scholars, between belief and knowledge sets up very troubling consequences that we need to rethink without reducing one to the other. I argue with Latour that emphasising this distinction in view of the multiple stories in circulation in the Norumedzo is tantamount to privileging one of these stories while silencing others.

In the section below I give an account of the *harurwa* origins in the Norumedzo based on the ethnographic fieldwork I carried out in the area.

Nemeso's mysterious powers caused harurwa

The version presented in this section is in fact, what I may call "the third version of the *harurwa* story" in circulation in the Norumedzo. Without privileging Chief Norumedzo's voice on the basis of his profile, I should note that besides being knowledgeable the Chief of the Varumedzo,

who is widely known in the Norumedzo area as the great story teller, is an old man with a wealth of experience. According to his national identity card, he was born in 1918. He, however, indicated that he was born before 1918, and that the date of birth in question was given to him when he obtained his first identity card in 1924 at the age of around ten. He also claims to have witnessed a number of clashes and raids in his area by the Ndebele people (by then known as *Madzviiti*) during the same time the white settlers were beginning to settle around areas bordering the present day Norumedzo Communal Area.

As narrated by Chief Norumedzo and many other knowledgeable village elders in Norumedzo, more than a century before the coming of the Ndebele and the white men in south-eastern Zimbabwe, a four-eyed boy was born to a young woman, Mhepo and Chief Pfupajena of the Mazungunye ruling family (*imba youshe*). Chief Pfupajena was the eldest son of Mazungunye and was crowned as a Chief in his early twenties after the death of his father. On hearing that his wife, Mhepo had given birth to a four-eyed boy, Chief Pfupajena wanted the child to be killed. This decision was in agreement with the traditional customs of the day which dictated that any child born physically challenged or born as twins should be strangled and not allowed to live. His uncle (the younger brother of Pfupajena) by the name Mutindi Mukanganwi who was the Chief advisor of Pfupajena, however, had a dream where he was told to secretly instruct Mhepo to run away with the child to the mountains in the east called Mambiru and later on known as Rumedzo. As Chief Norumedzo recounted Mutindi's dream:

While asleep in a dream, Mutindi saw a big lion with a shiny skin approaching him. In the dream, Mutindi was very frightened because he had no spear or an axe to fight the lion. As the lion approached and drew nearer, it immediately changed into an old man with grey hair and long white beards holding a walking stick. The old man, who appeared to be very worried, started talking: "Mutindi! Mutindi! Go and help Mhepo escape with the baby to the far-east Mountains I will show you. Mhepo should hide in the biggest cave in those mountains. You shall help feeding her and the baby. Do not worry for nothing shall befall either the mother or the baby. Do not disclose anything of what I have told you to anyone, even to your child, Pfupajena. Rise! Go immediately and deliver to Mhepo this message!" Mutindi then woke up only to find out that he was dreaming.

As emphasised by Chief Norumedzo and other knowledgeable informants in the Norumedzo, in the past (and even today) dreams were greatly revered and conceived as a way of knowing – what Michel Foucault (1984) calls the “techniques of self” meaning the ways through which people develop knowledge about themselves and direction of others. Chief Norumedzo was of the view that interpretation of some dreams is “natural”, that the meaning is clear, and that interpretative ability does not improve over time or with experience (see also Reynolds 1995). Such views agree

with Jung's (1968: 92) assertion that "the dream is its own interpretation". For Reynolds (1995: 27), as for the Varumedzo, anyone can draw insights or even the power to cure some ailments and foretell events from the spiritual realm (such as *mbondoro*/lion ancestor, *vadzimu*/ancestors) via dreams.

Over the years, many scholars (Plato in the *Theatetus*; Rene Descartes in the *Meditations*; Sigmund Freud 1900; Carl Gustav Jung 1875-1961[see Domhoff 2003]; Lucy Mair 1972; Evans-Pritchard 1982; Mawere 2011b; Ossai-Ugbah and Ossai-Ugbah 2011; Geddes and Grosset 1999; Hobson 1995) have emphasised the importance of dreams as one possible way of knowing. Hobson (1995), for example, submitted that dreams are not meaningless; rather, they convey cognitive elements which produce "novel configurations of information" that can help explain the world differently.

Likewise, among the Mazungunye/Pfupajena people, dreams were highly regarded such that Mutindi could not resist the words he heard from his dream as he believed they were orders from the ancestors. He immediately went and secretly instructed Mhepo to run away with the baby, assuring her that the ancestors and he will take care of them while in exile. When Mhepo and the child who was later on given the name, Nemeso (by Mutindi) came to the mountains, they lived in a cave and drank from a perennial well at the bottom of the mountains known as *Tsime raNemeso* (Nemeso's well).

It is said that during one of the days when Nemeso was about a year and half old, his mother went out of the cave doing her domestic chores. She left her son playing inside the cave. When she came back, she saw her son seated but blowing some dust using his hands. While doing this, Mhepo was surprised to see some green insects buzzing and flying into the cave forming a large nest by Nemeso's side. Mhepo wondered what the insects were and on what might have attracted them into the cave. Surprisingly, when Nemeso stopped blowing the dust the insects stopped flying into the cave only to start again when he resumed blowing. Mhepo was greatly frightened by this occurrence and pleaded to her ancestors and ancestors of the mountains not to harm her and her child.

When night fell, Mhepo dreamt hearing a voice, "Mhepo! Mhepo!" When she called back, she was told, "Do not be afraid of those insects. It is relish your child's ancestors have given him and you. The insects are known as *harurwa* and are a delicacy that will make your son's name famous and always remembered in all this land and beyond". She also saw a vision of the insects being prepared and ultimately turning golden brown. When Mhepo woke up, she couldn't

see the person who was talking, but could see the *harurwa* were still in their big nest in the cave. She pondered on the dream and the vision, and wondered how such green insects could turn golden brown. With the desire to authenticate or falsify the vision she ‘saw’ in her dream, Mhepo prepared some of the insects and indeed saw them turning their colour to golden brown. When she tested them, they were indeed a delicacy and she and her son started feeding on the insects.

The duo, Mhepo and Nemeso, stayed in the cave for about three years before Mhepo was instructed in another dream to run away with the child to her place of birth, Musikavanhu, in Chipinge. The two were accepted and given a place to build their own house by the Chief. It is said that while in this area, one of the days Chief Musikavanhu thought of visiting Mhepo and her son. He took a gift of a male sheep and asked his body-guard to accompany him with the gift to Mhepo and her son. On seeing the Chief arriving with his gift, Nemeso was very happy that he started ululating blowing dust in the air. Surprisingly, a big swarm of green insects instantly covered the sun around them buzzing and descending on the trees adjacent to Mhepo’s compound. They were *harurwa*. The Chief and his body-guard were quite perplexed by this event, but Mhepo appeared steady. When the Chief inquired of it from Mhepo, the latter answered: “Nemeso’s ancestors are very happy with you, and so have decided to give you a gift of these insects as relish for you and all your people. These are *harurwa*, and a delicacy”. The Chief was delighted to hear these words and promised that Mhepo and her child will stay freely in his land as long as they wished. Though no *harurwa* ceremonies are observed and the insects are not found in abundance as in the Norumedzo area, to date *harurwa* exist in Musikavanhu’s area.

When Nemeso grew up, Chief Musikavanhu advised him to go back to his father, Pfupajena (known nowadays as Mazungunye), before he marries. The Chief offered Nemeso some of his excellent councillors (*machinda*) including Manenga who was a spirit medium and one of his best fighters, to accompany him. When the message about Nemeso reached Pfupajena’s court (*dare*), Pfupajena was greatly frightened by the disclosure that Nemeso was still alive. He offered not to meet him and asked his uncle Mutindi (the forefather of the present day Chief Mukanganwi) to go and offer Nemeso all the land around the Mambiru rugged mountains (now the Rumedzo Mountains). The mountain was later called Rumedzo (the one that swallows) after a war between Nemeso’s army and that of Pfupajena’s senior councillors known in the Norumedzo history as *Hondo yeDzṽiti ramambo Pfupajena* (Pfupajena’s ruthless army). In this war which was fought in the Mambiru Mountains, Nemeso with the help of Manenga, a spirit medium and marksman of repute, had a resounding victory. His army managed to kill almost all the soldiers of the *Dzṽiti* regiment using rock boulders they released towards them. It is from this

war that the name Mambiru was changed to Rumedzo which means the one that swallows. Mazungunye (the then Pfupajena) vowed that he and all those who will reign as Mazungunye Chiefs in the future shall not come face-to-face with the Norumedzo Chief of all time. Thus, because of this declaration made by Chief Pfupajena/Mazungunye, the *Tsika dzechiDuma* (Duma people's customs and values) even to date dictates that anyone crowned as Chief Mazungunye is not allowed to set foot in the Norumedzo except under special circumstances of which the latter can only enter blindfolded and on a stretcher (not walking) (also see records by Plowden, 1978).

Nemeso is said to have lived in the cave where he once stayed with his mother for quite some time when he came back from Musikavanhu. He was very close to Manenga and is said to have later on got married and was blessed with two sons, Nemahwi and Rapfirwa before he migrated to Bvuma in the Matsai area in south Bikita where he later on died. Before he migrated to Bvuma, Nemeso told his sons how and why, by all forthcoming generations, *harurwa* should be 'cultivated' in the *jiri*, including all rituals and ceremonies to be held yearly as thanksgiving to the ancestors for giving them this precious gift, *harurwa*. In Bvuma, Nemeso was welcomed by Chief Neruungwe. Impressed by Chief Neruungwe's welcome, it is said Nemeso just blew dust in the air and *harurwa* appeared in the whole Bvuma area. Though no *harurwa* ceremonies are observed and the insects are not found in abundance as in the Norumedzo Area, to date *harurwa* still exist in Bvuma Area.

As can be seen, this account has a number of similarities and differences with Maredza and Nyathi's accounts, which underlines that there are multiple versions of *harurwa*. My version, however, tries to clarify some of the points that were unclear to me when I read Maredza and Nyathi's versions. Following the three incidents; in the Mambiru/Rumedzo caves, in the Musikavanhu area, and in Bvuma area where Nemeso blew dust in the air resulting in the immediate emergence/appearance of *harurwa* I, for instance, argue that it necessarily follows that Nemeso had mysterious powers to cause the existence of the insects, *harurwa* in whatever place he peacefully settled. As was explained in Mhepo's dream in the Mambiru/Rumedzo caves and from the aforementioned incidences, it can be argued that *harurwa* were indeed a gift given to Nemeso by his ancestors. Also, the eating of the insects, *harurwa* in the Norumedzo can only be traced to as far as Nemeso; hence if my fieldwork is anything to go by, Nemeso could be rightfully considered as the "causer of *harurwa*" – the one who had mysterious powers to cause the existence of *harurwa* – in the Norumedzo area.

Also, the account shows how stories about the origins of *harurwa* in the Norumedzo influence conservation practices and relational networks in the *jiri*. In fact, just like the

Varumedzo's conception of personhood discussed above, *harumwa* stories have greatly influenced the protection of the *jiri* and the relationships between Varumedzo and other beings over the years due to the myths and beliefs embedded in them.

Vanhu, zvisikwa, ontology, and relations in Norumedzo Community

My argument based on fieldwork that clear conception of personhood and mutual interaction and interdependence between all players or “actants” in conservation is a basis for conservation strategy finds support in post-humanities literature. This literature suggests that symmetrical relations of all actors in the environment must stimulate democratised relations and do away with modernistic nature/culture and subject/object as well as knowledge/belief binaries (see Haraway 2007; Latour 1993, 2007; Mapara 2009; Stengers 2007; De La Cadena 2010; Visvanathan 2009). The literature by the aforementioned scholars places emphasis upon the importance of interdependence and mutual relations between *vanhu* and other beings. In particular, Latour (1995: 19), for example, argues:

What would a man be without elephant, without plant, without lion, without cereal, without ocean, without ozone and without plankton, a lonely man, much lonelier than Robinson on his island? Less than a man. Certainly not a man. The city of ecology does not tell us that we need to pass from the human to nature [...] The city of ecology simply says that we don't know what makes the common humanity of man, and that, without Amboseli's elephants, without the bears of the Pyrenees, without the pigeons of the Lot, without the phreatic water of Beauce, maybe he would not be human.

The argument by Latour is the basis for his actor oriented perspective (particularly his Actor Network Theory [ANT]), with which he emphasises interdependence between actors, as he says actors can only do things in association or in relation with heterogeneous others (Latour 1986, 2005). Stengers (2007) agrees with Latour's argument above that perhaps we are not different from others (from what Latour, Stengers etc call nonhumans), but she adds that we are much more dangerous than others (the nonhumans) because we have thrown fears into our own adventures. For Stengers, the position that human beings especially during enlightenment period has emphasised is that of drawing binaries (such as humans/nonhumans, subjects/objects etc). These binaries assume superiority of humans over nonhumans in a way that threatens the lives and future of the latter such that we, humans are much more dangerous than others (nonhumans). For this reason, Stengers (2007: 141) argues along with Latour that the

subject/object opposition for a human/nonhuman binary should be abandoned as it points to questions of knowledge, questions that valorise, in the first place, the possibility of establishing a difference between what belongs to the subject that knows and the object that is known. Thus for Stengers (as with Latour and other posthumanities scholars such as Haraway), humans and nonhumans (which I call ‘other beings’ in this study) are not meant to be opposed, as it is not wholly known what a human is independently of the whole of the nonhumans that matter to one or on which one accounts to act. Here, as far as the argument advanced by Latour, Stengers and Haraway is concerned, I find literature coming through post-humanities that resonates with some of my observations on relations between *vanhu* and *zvisikwa* in the Norumedzo. In fact, the observation and analysis by Stengers, Latour and Haraway is germane to the cobweb of relations, networks and interactions I observed in the Norumedzo.

To the Varumedzo, relations between *vanhu* and *zvisikwa* are an everyday part of life to the extent that it is difficult to draw a solid line between *vanhu* and *zvisikwa* in terms of social connections and relationships as these seemed to depend on each other. However, even though relationships and social connections between *vanhu* and *zvisikwa* in the Norumedzo are so ubiquitous, I observed that there is a hierarchical order between *vanhu* and *zvisikwa* as opposed to Latour’s argument above that we are not different from others – what could be considered “flat ontologies” in view of Bruno Latour’s ANT. In terms of hierarchies among *vanhu* in the Norumedzo, the whole community has a head called *Ishe* (Chief), followed with *sadunhu* (sub-Chief), *sabhuku* (village head) and then *samusha* (household head). In terms of hierarchies between *vanhu* and other beings, I have already pointed out in the introduction of this dissertation that the Varumedzo depend much on their *Mwari* (God) and *vadzimu* (ancestors) as sources of knowledge, power and for guidance. The *vadzimu* which could be conceived as both *vanhu* and *vakatungamira vari kunyikadzimu* – those in the world beyond – are at the top of humans and *zvisikwa* (as far as the Varumedzo’s hierarchy of beings is concerned). *Mwari*, *mbondoro*, *vadzimu*, and *njuzu* (at the top of the hierarchy in that order) are consulted through *masvikiro* (spirit mediums) for directions before and during the *harurwa* ceremonies performed at the onset of *harurwa* season. Here, Latour’s ANT is germane to what I observed during fieldwork in Norumedzo where actors such as *vanhu* and *harurwa*, among others, related and acted in association in the protection of forests. Thus, as far as actors can only do things in association or in relation with heterogeneous others, I found Latour’s ANT critical and insights drawn from it useful. Latour’s ANT will, however, be rendered problematic in contexts such as Norumedzo in that it advocates flat ontologies. Latour (2005: 16), for example, says: “I could say ANT has tried to render the social world as *flat* as possible in order to ensure that the establishment of any new

link is clearly visible”. Yet in Norumedzo, the social world is not *flat* (as Latour would want it to be) given that it is characterised by hierarchies with some actors such as *njuḻu*, *vadžimu*, *mbondoro*, *Mwari*, among others, which are difficult to characterise as visible or invisible as they choose to manifest only when they wish to do so. This entails that while scholars such as Latour would advocate flat ontologies in terms of how *vanhu* should relate with other *vanhu* and with *ḻvisikwa*, the Varumedzo advocate hierarchical ontologies, or what scholars like Wesley Wildman call substantive ontologies as opposed to relational ontologies.

In light of that said, I argue that relations discussed above in view of scholars such as Latour are comparable with relational ontology as opposed to substantive ontology. As noted by Moses Boudourides (2005), since the last decade there has been a great talk around relational ontology in pragmatist philosophy (John Dewey), in anti-essentialist hermeneutics (Richard Rorty), in philosophy of culture and phenomenology of knowledge (Ernst Cassirer) and in science and technology studies (Bruno Latour) among other fields. Yet as Wesley Wildman (2006) (and also Patrik Aspers, 2010 and Inwagen, 2011) rightly observed: “Unfortunately, there is persistent confusion in almost all literature about relational ontology because the key idea of *relation* remains unclear. Once we know what relations are, and indeed what entities are, we can responsibly decide what we must mean, or what we can meaningfully intend to mean, by the phrase ‘relational ontology.’” What remains clear is that relational ontology in science and technology studies is commonly associated with Actor Network Theory (ANT) (Latour 1993; Law and Hassard 1999; Sundberg 2009). It [relational ontology] has long been crucial to the work of prominent feminist theorists involved in nature/culture debates, especially Donna Haraway (1989, 1991, 1997, 2003, 2008). Haraway’s (2003: 4) work on companion species, for instance, tells stories of “co-habitation, co-evolution, and embodied cross-species sociality.” In such tales, “the partners do not preexist their relating; all that is, is the fruit of becoming with” (Haraway 2008: 17).

Haraway’s conception of relational ontology is echoed by scholars such as Mustafa Emirbayer, Tim Ingold, Moses Boudourides, Wesley Goodman and others. Emirbayer (1997), for example, describes relational ontology as the social ontology, which conceives the social world primarily constituted rather by relations than by substances. For Ingold (2006), relational ontology proposes that the identities and properties of entities are determined by the relationships between entities. Similarly, Inwagen (2011) as Wildman (2006: 1) contends that for relational ontology, the relations between entities are more fundamental than the entities themselves. In short, relational ontology “postulates that relationships as ‘relations’ among actors

come first and actors as ‘entities’ carrying out action follow subsequently” (Boudourides 2006: 1-2). I find literature on relational ontology important in rethinking relations between humans and other beings. However, my observations during fieldwork revealed that the Varumedzo prioritised entities and not relations as relational ontologists advocate. When I asked some of my key informants why they don’t give primacy to relationships instead of entities, Mr Kwanai for instance, answered me with a question: “*Ko chinotanga chii munhu nebhukama hwake navamwe vanhu uye zvimwe zvisikwa?*”/What comes first a person or his relationships with other persons and other beings?” Mrs Itai, a village elder, echoed: “*Pane kuitirana pakati pemunhu navanhu uye nezvimwe zvisikwa zvichireva izvo kuti hatingatangi nekutaura zvinoitiranwa tisati tataura nezvevanoitirana*”/There is reciprocity between *munhu* and *vanhu* as well as other beings. This means that we can’t talk of what *vanhu* and *zvisikwa* do to each other before talking about the *vanhu* and *zvisikwa* themselves”. Scholars like Boudourides (2006: 4) would raise a similar question: “If relationships determine or come first than actors, then the question is what determines relationships?” I therefore argue with Boudourides (ibid) that if one wants to escape from any substantiation and to apply reflexively the same relational logic, then one falls on the impasse of an infinite and endless series of regressions.

From my conversations with Mr Kwanai, Mrs Itai, other Varumedzo and also my observations during fieldwork, relational ontology would, in fact, be problematic if applied in contexts such as Norumedzo given that it privileges relationships more than it does the entities from which relationships derive. Put differently, relational ontology understood in Ingold, Wildman and others’ terms pronounces the death of the subject (or entities), when in fact Varumedzo give primacy to entities (*vanhu* and *zvisikwa*) and not *hushamwari* (relationships). The Varumedzo would approach the issue of relational networks from the more concrete question of ‘order of entities and institutions’ in terms of how they [entities and institutions] are socially constructed and ordered in relation to each other. To show the primacy of entities over relationships, the Varumedzo (as with many other Shona people) have many sayings, for example: “*Chinotanga in’ombe kwozouya danga*” (*lit* What starts are the cattle before one constructs a cattle pen’; “*Ndozovabaya kuti chiropa hachisevesi* (*mean* people normally go for the best where there are alternatives” etc. These sayings show the primacy of entities (in this case cattle and people) though they also show the value of relationships and practices between different entities. They resonate with Peter van Inwagen’s (2011) argument in view of what he call his “favoured ontology” in which he says “a property or attribute is something that one ascribes to something – *an entity* – by saying a certain thing about it; xenophobia, for example, is what one ascribes to something (*e.g a person*) by saying that it is (*or he/she*) is a xenophobe” (p. 392, emphasis mine).

Motivated by my observations and Inwagen's explanation above, I argue that relational ontology that accords primacy to relationships (and not entities from which relations are derivative) legitimises the marginalisation of the lives and essences of the individuals (be they humans or otherwise) as substantive entities, thereby violating the integrity and self of the individual(s) that make relations possible.

As already alluded to, contrary to relational ontology is substantive ontology (Wildman 2006), which the Varumedzo seem to advocate for. Substantive ontology, though it values relations, accords primacy to entities from which relations are derivative. For Wildman (2006: 1), substantive ontology entails that entities are ontologically primary and relations ontologically derivative. From my fieldwork experiences, this [substantive ontology] is thus the kind of ontology that is closer to the Varumedzo's relations with other *vanhw* and other beings.

Substantive ontology, just like political ontology, and relational ontology, among others, are "the ontological differences" which Mario Blaser (2013) argues is 'missing *in social sciences such as anthropology* thus producing the conditions of possibility for disavowing ontological conflicts – conflicts about what is there and how they constitute realities in power-charged fields" (p. 548-49, emphasis added). In fact, the missing of ontological conflicts in many social science disciplines such as Anthropology, perhaps with the exception of the works of Mafeje (1976) and Asad (1973) published in the 70s, rules out the "possibility of multiple ontologies" (Blaser 2013: 549) of which substantive ontology in the Norumedzo is one. Surfacing such multiple ontologies and ontological conflicts (i.e. a conflict between different realities) is critical in challenging Western "modernity and its hegemonist scientific culture which seem to be almost definitive of our times" (Leach, Scoones, and Wynne 2005:5–6; Blaser 2013: 549; see also Mukamuri 1995a; Mawere 2012; Mapara 2009). In view of the Western enlightenment modernity's hegemonic culture, I follow Ranajit Guha (1997: 23) in using the term *hegemony* to refer to "a condition of dominance, such that, in the organic composition of dominance, persuasion outweighs coercion". Besides, multiple ontologies and ontological conflicts "provide both the context and the rationale for political ontology, a loosely connected project emerging from the convergence of ideas advanced in various scholarly fields (indigenous studies, science and technology studies [STS], posthumanism, and political ecology, among others)" (Blaser 2013: 548), which is partly presented in this dissertation. Political ontology has the merit that it "tells stories that open up space for, and enact, the pluriverse or multiple ontologies without producing other ontologies/worlds as absences" (Blaser 2013: 553; see also Santos 2004): it fosters the anthropological wisdom of taking others and their real difference seriously (Claudia Briones in

Blaser 2013: 560). Thus, given that there are a variety of relations (such as phenomenological, causal, conceptual, logical, axiological, imaginary, internal, external, hierarchical, perceptual, God-world relation, intra-Trinitarian relations, etc [Wildman 2006: 4], substantive ontology of the Varumedzo does not necessarily silence other possible ontologies, but simply presents itself as a different way of world making.

Even with the different [possible] ontologies explained above, it is of interest to note that both Latour and Blaser, as well as the Varumedzo, all advocate for ‘good’ relations between *vanhu* and other beings. The only difference is how those relationships should be conceived. In the Norumedzo, for example, the order, as well as mutual social interdependence and good relations between *vanhu* and *zvisikwa*, is regulated or moderated by ‘local’ institutions and belief systems such as taboos (see also Sheridan and Nyamweru 2008), among others. In view of this order and hierarchical relationships, *harurwa* could be conceived as partners in forest conservation, and could also be exploited for livelihood and food by humans. This is something that could be impossible if *harurwa* were to be conceived in terms of Latour’s *flat ontologies*, that is, as equal beings to humans.

Relational networks and conservation practices in the Norumedzo community

While substantive ontology (as compared to other ontological theories such as relational) seems to best describe relationships between *vanhu* and other beings such as *zvisikwa* in the Norumedzo, it only does this in as far as it accords primacy to entities (such as *vanhu* and *zvisikwa*) over *ushamwari* (relationships). Put differently, substantive ontology does not explain relationships between *vanhu* and *zvisikwa* in terms of the hierarchies in the order of beings, hence the need to develop an assessment or perspective of the relational network that generates local ways of protecting the forest. Relational study of social entities, as the logic of social network analysis, has been developing best and most widely with the general understanding that a social network consists of actors and patterns of relationships among them – epitomising, a social network *is* actors *plus* relationships (Boudourides 2006: 1). Now, given the critiques I have highlighted in view of relational ontology and substantive ontology as well as those levelled against Latours’ (2005) Actor Network Theory over the years (see Sokal and Bricmont 1999; Boudourides 2006; Blake 2013; White 2013), I have proposed a network perspective (I tentatively call engagement zones perspective) which I think is more relevant, applicable and can

describe relational networks in contexts such as the Norumedzo. This perspective was proposed in the introduction of this dissertation and will be expanded on below.

Before expounding my aforementioned perspective, I start by emphasising Latour's (1986; 2005) assertion that from an actor (or network) oriented perspective, actors can only do things in association or in relation with heterogeneous others. This assertion is germane to what I observed during fieldwork in Norumedzo where actors such as humans and *harurwa*, among others, related and acted in association in the protection of forests. Thus, as far as actors can only do things in association or in relation with heterogeneous other, I found Latour's ANT and assertion emphasised above useful. Yet, as I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, Latour's ANT is rendered problematic in contexts such as Norumedzo mainly because Latour advocates *flat* ontologies. I have previously argued in this chapter that through ethnographic observations, I found this contrary to the Varumedzo's modes of relations as their social world is not *flat* or rhizomatic, given that it is characterised by hierarchies with some actors such as *njuzu*, *mbondoro*, *vadzimu*, *Mwari*, among others, difficult to characterise as visible or invisible as they choose to manifest only when they wish to do so. I can only point out that Latour's (2005: 10) assertions in view of his ANT that: "If the social remains stable and is used to explain a state of affairs, it's not ANT" and "the word actor means that it's never clear who and what is acting when we act since an actor on the stage is never alone in acting" (p. 46) are problematic. Such statements in the context of Norumedzo where *unhu/ubuntu* – a philosophy of humanness that advocates unity, peace and togetherness – is considered a virtue could be interpreted as advocating chaos and not peace because if the social remains unstable and the actor unknown or at least not fully accountable for its action, then the possibility of occurrence of chaos among actors becomes difficult to rule out. In the context of politics, for example, one politician could act violently against others only to argue that he [she] should not be held accountable for the action because he [she] was never alone in the action. So it is in the context of *jiri*. One could, for example, set the *jiri* on fire only to argue that he [she] should not be held accountable for the action simply because when he [she] was acting he [she] was never alone in the action.

From the foregoing, I contend that the Varumedzo use (directly or otherwise) an actor oriented perspective in their interactions and relations with other *vanhu* and *zvisikwa* in a way that accepts hierarchies while at the same time promote peace and sustainability; hence my proposal of an engagement zones approach as an enhanced actor-oriented approach that can help explain social networks and cobweb of relationships in Norumedzo. Engagement zones approach, being an actor oriented perspective, places diverse actors (not only humans) at the centre of

conservation culture and resource management. It underscores different modes of engagement by the actors.

Elaborating on the proposed engagement zones approach in relation to conservation practices and relational networks in the Norumedzo, I start by spelling out what I mean by engagement zones. These are points or zones where different ‘things’/beings/entities/actors interact, associate, disassociate, connect, disconnect, meet and part freely or otherwise. In the context of Norumedzo, the entities include *Mvari*, *vanhu*, *harurwa*, *vadzimu*, *mbondoro*, *njuzu* etc. which meet in engagement zones. Engagement zones are like ‘political grounds’ or playing grounds where opponents play to win each other, and associates (those from the same team) meet to sharpen their skills or to work for the common goal whatever it might be (e.g sustainable conservation). In the context of Norumedzo, the engagement zone could be the *jiri* where different actors encounter each other for different reasons, for example, participating in the communal resource conservation which some scholars (Marongwe 2002; Katerere 1999) would refer to as organic community based natural resource management (CBNRM)¹². In such zones (as the *jiri*), antagonisms or co-operations, merging/integrations or disconnections, and symmetries or asymmetries are normally experienced as is normally the case where different actors meet. This means that in such zones/playing grounds, as in any game where rules are important, referees are also present to regulate the game. I should underline that the referees, in the context of Norumedzo, are the institutions and philosophies such as *unhu/ubuntu* as well as social values (including moral and ethical values) that regulate different actors’ behaviour and actions in their interactions with others. In this sense, engagement zones may be either productive and helpful or counter-productive and destructive depending on how actors relate or interact with each other. This means that engagement zones approach underscores different modes of engagement by the actors. In the context of Norumedzo, some of the actors that engage in the engagement zones such as *vadzimu* and *mbondoro* (among others) are conceived as both living, non-living or otherwise. *Vadzimu*, for example, can be understood as spirits of passed on family members which can manifest in living family members. These spirits are *fluid*

¹² There are three main models of CBNRM namely organic, imposed and assisted models. Organic model, which is the one practised in Norumedzo, is characterised by more collaboration and less competition among stakeholders, common vision, communities inputting into policy processes, knowledge generation, sharing of experience, benefits generation and sharing among other benefits. Imposed models are marked by fierce competition among stakeholders, lack of common vision, no involvement of communities in policy processes, individualism, no sharing of information, no benefit sharing, conflict between government and local communities and many other factors. Assisted CBNRM models lie between the two extreme models, organic and imposed (see Katerere 1999; Marongwe 2002: 194).

such that they cannot be equated to souls when they decide to manifest or rest in another person or objects such as trees. In fact, even though a *mudzimu* is deemed to manifest in a particular tree, animal etc., he [she] is not considered to have become the feature (in this case the tree or animal) through which he manifested his presence (see also Opoku 1978; Fontein 2006; Machirori 2012; Bourdillon 1987). As Bourdillon (1987) rightly points out, *mbondoro* spirit is a revered Shona ancestral and territorial spirit that can manifest in form of a [friendly] lion and is believed to have dominion over a very big area. Its anger can result in misfortune or even death of the perpetrators, for example, those who upset the environment. The ability of a *mbondoro* to manifest in a lion, tree or other human beings shows the fluidity of spirits in the Shona cosmology. Fontein (2006) and Machirori (2012), for example, confirm that the spirit of Nehanda Nyamita Nyakasikana (commonly known as Mbuya Nehanda), a Zimbabwe legend and spirit medium who was executed on the 27th of April 1898, has so far manifested and operated through several people including Charwe, Nehanda of Dande, Karoi Nehanda and Ambuya Sofia Muchini of Nemanwa in Masvingo. As such, both *vadzimu* and *mbondoro* can be conceived of as both living and nonliving or “the living-dead” (Bourdillon 1993; Mawere 2010; Mawere 2011b). This perspective [engagement zones] is motivated by my observations in the Norumedzo where, as explained above, relationships and interconnectedness are in a way determined by entities and institutions, yet they are not only limited to the so-called ‘living’ and/or humans but extend to other beings conceived as living, nonliving or otherwise.

In proposing the engagement zones perspective, I seek to go beyond the enlightenment modernist divisions of the world into nature and culture, yet aim to avoid reducing them to one another and without depreciating or altering social relationships of the different actors in any way. For example, without equating *vanhu* with other beings in the strict sense of the word ‘equal’, as flat ontologies might advocate. I argue that categories such as nature/culture are a Western modernist construct that fail to appreciate the different ways in which actors relate with each other in engagement zones whether productively (or in a counter-productive way depending on how they relate), especially in issues of conservation. Engagement zones perspective thus offers considerable flexibility in the interaction and relational networking of entities that underlies every aspect of the entities involved: it underlines different modes of engagements by actors. This way, I think my engagement zones perspective, unlike “the one-sided strategies of either the substantivist ontology (which can be *criticised* for paying insufficient attention to important relations that morally oblige us) or the relational ontology (*which critics say* it does too little to interfere with our selfish tendency to pay insufficient attention to the intrinsically valuable entities all around us) *addresses theoretical difficulties around entities and relations*”

(Wildman 2006: 8, emphasis original). Besides, unlike Latour's ANT, I think my engagement zones perspective succeeds as one form of an actor-oriented approach, in explaining the complex networks and cobweb of [causal] relationships in the Norumedzo (and elsewhere) insofar as it treats as fully real and equally important both *entities* and *relations*. As Long and Long (1992) argue, an actor-oriented approach that recognises diversity of actors (which my proposed engagement zones perspective does) while at the same time emphasises the meanings that different actors attach to local natural resource systems where institutions emanate from the strategic action of human agents in their everyday interactions, will enable actors to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing circumstances. This is resonant with de Melo's (1979) argument that the human being "is a being of relationships rather than solely of contacts, he [she] is not merely in the world, *but with the world*" (p.175, emphasis original). Long and Long's argument and de Melo's assertion help us to understand that humans relate with humans and other beings as with the kind of situation that obtains in Norumedzo today – where there is a network of relationships between different beings (humans and other beings) and with diverse beings at the centre of the networks. As espoused by Escobar (2007: 227), 'networks' is a concept that enjoys great favour in a variety of fields and in connection to a variety of problems; it has been invoked as the central organising principle of the information society; as the basis on which society and technoscience are structured and function (the actor-network-theory); and as an explanation for transnational social movements organisations.

As can be seen in the preceding discussion, I focus in this chapter, and of course throughout this work, on certain understanding of networks as a cobweb of complex relationships between humans and other beings (as those found in the *jiri*) that needs careful unpacking if they are to be well understood and not confused with understanding of the same elsewhere. In Norumedzo, for instance, I observed on one hand that *harurwa* were used by people for food and as a source of livelihood sustenance i.e. *harurwa* were sold locally and at selling points such as Nyika Growth Point. On the other hand, people were obliged to protect the *jiri* where *harurwa* are 'cultivated' or thrive when in season. The protection of the *jiri* was to ensure the continued existence of *harurwa* in the Norumedzo. This way, I could observe that in the *jiri* all actors (humans and other beings) are conceived as "active participants who process information and strategise in their dealings with some local actors as well as interveners" (Long and Long 1992: 21). Such a scenario, which in itself resembles or is one typical example of the actor-oriented approach, stresses the dynamic and active social interactions between social agents and institutions which shape and reshape each other through interactions and relational networks. To draw my point closer home, I observed in the Norumedzo, that humans depended

on the forest resources in the *jiri* for their livelihood, while the forests and biodiversity therein [in the *jiri*] depended on conservation practices by the local people for their continued existence. Each actant/participant, thus, benefited from the other though in different ways. The conservation was communal in so far as all local participants participated in one way or another. These relational networks thus constituted strategic self-survival networks for coping with political, socio-economic challenges and consolidating collective sustainable conservation and management of the *jiri*. This observation agrees with Nemarundwe's (2003) assertion that the actor-oriented approach provides a set of analytical tools useful for describing and analysing changes in social patterns, interactions and institutional arrangements.

To sum up, this chapter has discussed the conception of personhood by the Norumedzo people as well as accounts on the origins of *harurwa* in Norumedzo, and how these influence relational networks, conservation practices and ontological conflicts in the same community. With the accounts (as with the conception of personhood by the Varumedzo examined in this chapter), I therefore, intended to contribute new perspectives on the understanding of the origins of *harurwa* in Norumedzo and to show how the accounts, as with the conception of personhood by the Varumedzo, influence protection of the *jiri*. In the next chapter, I further pursue the ontological conflicts facing *jiri* conservation in relation to how the Norumedzo Communal Area has changed and adapted through time as a result of social tensions and village politics.

CHAPTER 4: Social Tensions, Village Politics and Natural Resource Conservation in the Norumedzo Communal Area

Introduction

During my initial days in the field site in Norumedzo Communal Area, I heard many stories about the Norumedzo *Jiri*. It was, however, apparent that the possibility of there being multiple and even conflicting stories (of the different political assumptions existent in Norumedzo) were being avoided (deliberately or otherwise) by my interlocutors. Yet, multiple ontologies and ontological conflicts inherent in story telling “provide both the context and the rationale for political ontology, a loosely connected project emerging from the convergence of ideas advanced in various scholarly fields (indigenous studies, science and technology studies [STS], posthumanism, and political ontology, among others)” (Blaser 2013: 548). Both the context and rationale for political ontology are partly presented in this chapter. Political ontology has the merit that it “tells stories that open up space for, and enact, the pluriverse or multiple ontologies without producing other ontologies/worlds as absences” (Blaser 2013: 553; see also Santos 2004). In fact, political ontology “fosters the anthropological wisdom of taking *the different* others and their real difference seriously” (Claudia Briones cited in Blaser 2013: 560, emphasis original). In this case, ‘the different others’ are the members of the Norumedzo community who perceived things differently without trying to “tame difference” (Gledhill 2012: 233), thereby surfacing multiple ontologies and possibly ontological conflicts, that is, “conflicts between different realities” to use Blaser’s (2013: 547) phrase. As highlighted above, these multiple ontologies and ontological conflicts were not told [to me] and I did not observe them during my first days of fieldwork: the variety of conflicts or other possible political worlds were presented as absences yet present. In fact, the conflicts or other possible political worlds were both present and absent in the sense that they existed yet were not revealed to me.

Though low *harurwa* yields in the previous few years in the Norumedzo were mentioned, none of the community members talked about the challenges, particularly the (local) politics which in many ways affected activities, interactions and relations between some participants in the *jiri* and the Norumedzo community at large. I wanted to explore how ecological legacies and practices as well as politics among the Norumedzo people have come to bear on the *harurwa* in recent years; to examine how *harurwa* have been remade as a political actor in the Norumedzo area. For me, it was not enough to ask, “What happened and perhaps may still happen to the

harurwa to diminish in their yields?” Instead, there was a more fundamental question that required an answer from my fieldwork: “How has the changing relationship between *harurwa*, the *jiri* and humans brought the *harurwa* into existence in a way that has made them vulnerable to new threats?” Such a question demanded attention to histories of humans, *jiri* and the *harurwa* and their current remaking, yet during initial days of fieldwork, as my research assistants – Tendai and James – and I trudged around the community, many local members were in agreement that Norumedzo *Jiri* was a perfect story without any ‘dirty’ politics involved. Such kinds of reports were in total agreement with the assertion by some researchers that while there is a widespread trend of ineffective state control over resource tenure and a breakdown of local management institutions, there are also some examples of highly successful collective management of natural resources, most of which are a continuity of traditional systems (Makuku 1993) and others are formed with external assistance (McCay and Acheson 1988). For me, the Norumedzo case was more of a ‘conservation model’ that was going to enable me to study the networks, interactions, relations, cultural and socio-economic impacts of the *jiri*, document its conservation practices and encourage other conservationists elsewhere to emulate this approach where possible. “But was the Norumedzo story really a perfect success story?” This question kept on lingering at the back of my mind.

Certainly, my interlocutors wanted to build their trust and confidence in me, to first of all see if I was the right person to confide in what was actually (and had indeed) been going on in the Norumedzo community.

By the time I spent about two months in the Norumedzo Communal Area, I had already made quite a number of friends and developed rapport with many other community members. Through conversations with these friends and some of my interlocutors, I began to notice that some communal members were concealing the truth about the complexity of what was going on in Norumedzo Community, most of which had and was affecting conservation and management of the *jiri* in different ways. It came to my attention that there were social tensions and divisions between members of the community emanating from chieftainship succession conflicts in the Norumedzo ruling family. As time went on, I could no longer see the unity I had observed during my first days in the Norumedzo. This observation made me even more curious to follow the trail, to understand clearly what was going on and the reasons behind the tensions and conflicts in the Norumedzo Community.

As I became even more familiar to the majority of the community members, the words I kept on hearing from most of my respondents were “tension” and “conflict”. I could see there

were certainly ontological conflicts in the Norumedzo community. In fact, it was now evident that there were some conflicts that ensued the Norumedzo conservation culture “as different worlds or ontologies strove to sustain their own existence, interacted and mingled with each other” (Blaser 2009: 11). But what were these ‘tensions’ and ‘conflicts’ in this community? What has been the impact of the conflicts and tensions on the conservation culture of the *jiri*? These became some of the central questions I set to answer as my fieldwork progressed.

Mindful of these research questions, this chapter explores the political tensions and conflicts in the Norumedzo Communal Area. Though making some references to the [Zimbabwe] national politics, I focus more on the local political dynamics, particularly on how they have affected activities, interactions and relations in the research site, especially conservation practices in the Norumedzo *Jiri*. The chapter looks at local level leadership and politics in the Norumedzo Communal Area before examining the causes of tensions and conflicts as well as their impacts on *harurwa* harvests and relational networks in the *jiri* conservation.

The complexity of conflicts in the Norumedzo Area

The discourse on conflicts and/or tensions is dynamic and has sustained controversies of some proportions in issues of politics and the environment or what is generally known as *political ontology* – “the power-laden negotiations involved in bringing into being the entities that make up a particular world or ontology” (Blaser 2009: 11). Given the nebulous nature of the concept “conflict” coupled with the different interpretations evoked by its [the concept] deployment across different disciplines, a robust comprehension of the concept calls into question its practical manifestations and application in particular situated contexts, particularly those of Environmental Sciences and/or Anthropology. In a bid to understand conflict, Wallensteen (2007) argues that conflict is formed of three parts: incompatibility, action and actors – and, therefore, a ‘complete definition’ of conflict is “a social situation in which a minimum of two actors (parties) strive to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources” (Wallensteen 2007: 15). The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD 2002: 4) similarly defines conflict as “a state of human interaction where there is disharmony or a perceived divergence of interests, needs or goals” such that goals, needs and interests can hardly be achieved due to interference from the other part(s). This is echoed by some scholars (Castro and Nielson 2003; Yasmi et al. 2006), who argue that conflict, as with social tensions, normally emerges when stakeholders have irreconcilable differences or

incompatible interests, values, power, perceptions and goals. White et al. (2009: 244) distinguish conflict from a mere disagreement when they state that: “What distinguishes conflicts from mere disagreement is thus a behavioural expression of formerly latent attitudes where one party is perceived to take action at the expense of another party’s interests”. Some examples of expressions of conflicts are “threats, beating, appropriation, insurgency, skirmishes, and interstate or intrastate wars” (Reuveny 2007: 656).

Making an analysis of conflicts, and in particular environmental conflicts, Hellstrom (2001), argues that competition for finite environmental resources, divergent attitudes and beliefs as well as institutional factors trigger and exacerbate environmental conflicts. While all the definitions elaborated above capture the meaning of conflict, this dissertation identifies with Swartz’s understanding of the concept which also captures the meaning of social tension. For Swartz (1968), conflict (as with social tension) refers to the actual or perceived opposition of values, needs, interests, ideas and beliefs of a people in a particular context (Swartz 1968), in this case, the Norumedzo Communal Area where conflicts resulted mainly from the different interests between Mr Chikwariro and Mr Mukombe, as shall be explained later in this chapter. Building on this understanding of conflict, Swartz argues that to understand conflicts in a particular context one should go beyond focusing on studying a political structure or system to examine political processes, social arrangements and use of power within the political field. This means examining interactions, relationships and networks between all participants, humans and other beings, in the community involved. In the context of Norumedzo Communal Area, the *jiri*, *harurwa*, local people including the chief, village heads, and the ward councillor constituted a political field as they are all actors or participants that in one way or another were involved in socio-political disagreements, clashes and misunderstandings in the community. Identifying conflicts and the political field in the system or society studied is important as “not recognising conflicts between groups leaves control in the hands of the more powerful by default” (Crewe 1997: 77), such as chiefs, village heads and politicians. Thus, viewing conflict from this perspective, I started exploring the socio-political disagreements, clashes and misunderstandings that resulted in hatred and differences in interests among the local members of the Norumedzo Community.

From what I observed during the course of my fieldwork, succession tensions and conflicts had divided the Norumedzo people into two main camps, and had also impacted on activities and conservation practices in the Norumedzo *Jiri*, particularly on *harurwa* yields and harvests. I, therefore, realised that there is a link between ecology and politics given that the struggles over political ecology are ontological, in this case, a struggle over what it means to be

politically right. Human politics, ecological practices and anthropogenic activities as affecting insects, for example, have been recorded elsewhere (see van Engelsdorp et al. 2009; Kosek 2010; Cox-Foster and van Engelsdorp 2009). As Kosek (2010: 650) reports of the insects, honeybees:

Global environmental changes, including the intensification of industrial agriculture, toxic pollution, climate change, loss of habitat, and disease, have been devastating. But the most recent trouble came in 2006 and 2007, when almost 40 percent of honeybees in the United States disappeared and millions of hives around the world were lost ... That drop in honeybee populations eclipsed all previous mass mortality in the bee world, making it the worst recorded crisis in the multi-millennial history of beekeeping.

Though from the outset I also wanted to explore how human politics in the Norumedzo have influenced the organisation of the *jiri*, and affected the yields and harvests of *harurwa*, it became apparent that the locals could not have revealed the political conflicts that had and were indeed taking place in their area to a newcomer, as I was during my first days. This was clearly revealed when I asked one of my respondents, a senior citizen, why they took so long to unravel the political tensions and politics in the community. The response I received was: *“Pachivanhu chedu munhu kwaye haafukuri hapwa kuwaenzi, chero zvinhu zvisina kutimirira zvakanaka*/According to our culture, a good person doesn’t reveal home secrets to visitors even when our house is not in order”. To me, this was a worthwhile lesson. I began to cautiously explore issues of tension and conflict as I observed that pre-existing social contexts may influence conservation issues of the whole community.

As explained in chapter 1 of this study, in the Norumedzo, as in other rural communities in Zimbabwe, both state/bureaucratic government leadership and traditional leadership structures are legislatively supported by the following statutes; revised edition of Rural District Councils (RDCs) of 1996, the Provincial Councils and Administration Act (PCAA) Number 12, the Traditional Leaders Act Chapter 29: 17, Number 25 of 1998 and the Constitution of Zimbabwe (EISA Report 2007: 79), and also the current Constitution of Zimbabwe (The New Constitution of Zimbabwe gazetted on 22 May 2013). To this effect, all the aforementioned statutes maintain that the head of the state appoints traditional leaders who have been selected at local levels according to customary laws and with the aid of local government. This means that the state law provides for the recognition of traditional leadership in society albeit being restricted and subservient to the modern governance system. In terms of customary laws, the family lineage of the chief, sub-chiefs, and headmen know potential heirs to be installed in the event of death of any of the abovementioned traditional leaders. Talking particularly about the

Norumedzo, succession to the rank of a chief is not random, yet rotational. It is governed by the common principles of *collateral succession* whereby the eldest son, regardless of the position or rank of his mother in the ruling family, succeeds to the personal name and position of his father. When he dies, his next youngest brother (or half brother) succeeds to the father's name until the generation of sons of the father is exhausted and the eldest grandson succeeds to the name and position of his grandfather. The determining factor is the order of birth amongst successive grandsons; hence chieftainship in the Norumedzo is rotational in the aforementioned sense (see also Holleman 1952; 1969). This means in the Norumedzo (as elsewhere in Zimbabwe), a chief would stay in office as long as he is alive and does nothing to despise or disobey the precepts of the *mbondoro* and *vadzimu*. This is even supported by the Shona proverb (among other aphorisms) that “*Hakuna zuva rinobuda rimwe risati radoka*”/There is no sun that rises before the other one has set”. This proverb simply stresses the point that in the Shona culture (of which the Norumedzo is part), a chief could not be ousted as long as he has the backing of the ancestors and of course the government.

While traditional leadership and government leadership exist aside to each other, both structures play a fundamental role in influencing environment conservation practices such as those deployed in the management of the Norumedzo *Jiri*. Projects, whether to do with development or conservation, are disapproved or approved through leadership of these structures before implementation is done. To this effect, leaders play key roles in approving and disapproving projects in and for the whole community. This position of leaders in itself opens way for personal interests and sometimes manipulation of power over projects at particular levels. Although the existence of Norumedzo *Jiri* conservation culture now cut through several decades if not centuries, it has, in view of these structures gone through the same process of being approved at different levels after having noticed its effectiveness in conserving natural resources in the area. Customarily, all the local leaders found places as authorities in the conservation of Norumedzo *Jiri*, either as *harurwa* administrators or headmen who supply the *jiri* with ‘*harurwa* policemen’. The same applies to the state/government leadership structures with the councillor, who currently is from the Movement for Democratic (MDC¹³ (both MDC-T and MDC-M) party. The councillor, on behalf of the Rural District Development Committee (RDDC), takes part as the WARD president in issues of development and conservation in the

¹³ These two factions are known as MDC-T (MDC-Tsvangirai) and MDC-M (MDC Mutambara) after the respective leaders of each faction at the time of the split of the MDC political party. While MDC-M has claimed as the legitimate MDC party, MDC-M has subsequently, and confusingly, become known as MDC.

Norumedzo Communal Area. It is in this sense that local politics found its way in development and conservation issues of the Norumedzo Communal Area right from the village level.

Causes of village tensions and conflicts in the Norumedzo Communal Area

In the Norumedzo, it was revealed that the conflicts around environment and resource conservation were ignited and exacerbated by different factors. The factors included party politics, chieftainship succession conflicts, and the District Administration Office's (DAO) role in handling chieftainship succession issues.

In terms of party politics, I observed that traditional and government leaders found positions/places in the conservation and development projects in Norumedzo Area much more easily than the 'ordinary' community members. These leaders were able to significantly organise and control activities and events in the Norumedzo Area in general and in particular in the *jiri*. However, having the authority and power to control activities and events vested in leaders created an opportunity for conflict among leaders themselves, local/traditional and modern conservation methodologies as practiced by the state, and between different members of the community in terms of their varying perspectives, beliefs and interests. For instance, because the councillor of the Norumedzo Area (ward 15), who is also a key actor in development and conservation issues in that area belongs to the MDC – T party, some members from the opposing party, Zimbabwe African National Unity Patriotic Front (ZANU PF), brought into the *jiri* conservation project the political power, ideologies, interests and values they already possessed by virtue of them being members of the party that claimed to have liberated the country from colonial rule. These observations resonate with Terence Ranger (2004) and Joost Fontein's (2006) on the historiography and conservation of Great Zimbabwe Monument in the Nemanwa area of Masvingo District, Zimbabwe. Fontein (2006: 164), for example, points out that the ZANU (PF) government used a local event in May 2004 marking the return of a Zimbabwe Bird from a Berlin museum to the Masvingo Chiefs as an opportunity to solidify its own rural and 'traditionalist' support, especially in the face of political opposition from the MDC. Ranger (2004: 223) also notes that as far as the historiography and conservation of Great Zimbabwe Monument is concerned, ZANU (PF) and Robert Mugabe are made to appear as "custodians of history" while the MDC represents "the end of history *and* an a-historicised, globalised morality". While the return of the Zimbabwe Bird was an event worth celebrating and the need for reconstructing the country's history a worthwhile endeavour, what seems to

negatively impact conservation at Great Zimbabwe Monument is the exclusion of other stakeholders in the protection of the the Monument, the insistence “on an increasingly *narrow* and monolithic history” (Ranger 2002: 60) and the spirit of intolerance in some ZANU (PF) members. In view of the Norumedzo Communal Area, I argue that it is this ‘culture of intolerance’ that has adversely affected traditional practices of participatory democracy, and created serious tensions and conflicts among members of the community. One member, Mr Ronzai, for example, revealed that:

Muraini medu sabhuku anova iye weZANU (PF) akasarudza vanhu vekupati yake chete kuti vaite mapurisa emujiri/eharurwa. Vaya vaizivikanwa kana kufungidzirwa kuti ndeve MDC vakabva vasiiva zvavo pachena/In our village, the headman who is ZANU (PF) member chose members who belonged to his political party to become harurwa policemen in the jiri. Those who were believed or known to be MDC members were deliberately left out.

As has been explained in chapter 2 of this dissertation, traditionally, a rotational selection of representatives from each of the fifty-six villages (44 registered and 12 unregistered with the government) are selected to act as members of the *harurwa* caretaker team residing at a camp (*musasa*) in the *jiri* throughout the harvest season/period. This team is responsible for monitoring the *jiri* and ensuring that all the traditional restrictions associated with *harurwa* harvesting and *jiri* conservation are strictly followed. This means that the unilateral selection of representatives by the headman cited above is real abuse of office according to the Varumedzo customs and values: it contradicts the Varumedzo’s democratic monitoring practices of the *jiri*. Such abuses of power by some traditional leaders made it very difficult for some local members to separate different power sources that mandated them to act the way they did from the conservation issues in the *jiri*. During my fieldwork, I closely observed Mr Paradzai (not his real name) who was the self proclaimed leader of the four *harurwa* administrators for 2012 [*harurwa*] season, and a member of ZANU (PF) district committee. When addressing other *harurwa* administrators, the *harurwa* policemen and *harurwa* harvesters in the *jiri*, his political tone, commanding voice and persistent giving of orders could be observed. He demonstrated ZANU (PF)’s dominance and culture of intolerance with which it entailed an undisguised commandist attitude and viewed “its political opponents as enemies to be annihilated rather than as political competitors” (Muzondidya 2009: 177). In fact, from Mr Paradzai’s approach when dealing with *harurwa* issues, one could easily mistake the *harurwa* meetings to have been ZANU (PF) political party meetings when it was him chairing. While he supported and respected the traditional beliefs and values associated with the *jiri* and *harurwa*, he stressed that the policemen should safely guard the *jiri* so as not to disappoint ancestors and their leaders at all levels, especially from his political party where many heroes died

liberating the country. This resonates with Fontein's (2006) observations in the Nemanwa area of Masvingo District, where he observed that while some war veterans (who were pro-ZANU [PF]) in the area respected the religious beliefs attached to Great Zimbabwe National Monument, they always demanded that the monument should be used in line with what the fighters of the liberation struggle fought for.

Also, throughout the whole *harurwa* season that I worked closely with Mr Paradzai, the *harurwa* policemen, *harurwa* harvesters and other *harurwa* administrators, I observed that none of the mentioned could easily challenge Mr Paradzai openly when it came to decision-making of issues in the *jiri*. I could observe that there was some fear of him among other *harurwa* administrators, *harurwa* policemen and daily *harurwa* harvesters to the extent that no decisions could be made without consulting him. One of the *harurwa* administrators, Mr Nyeverai (not his real name) confided such fear to me:

While traditionally we have the same post and equal powers as harurwa administrators, it is problematic to make any decision about harurwa and the jiri in the absence of Mr Paradzai given that he talks 'too much'. Also, his political position as a former ZANU (PF) ward chairperson and his political activism affords him the power to be feared and influence other community members in decision making. Failure to consult him always has serious repercussions to us all.

The above sentiments were also echoed by some *harurwa* policemen and other *harurwa* administrators. In fact all the *harurwa* policemen and administrators I interviewed felt that Mr Paradzai was unable to separate party politics from issues of community development and conservation in the *jiri*. Some *harurwa* harvesters also reported that some harvesters and *harurwa* administrators behave as if the *jiri* belonged to ZANU (PF), as they sometimes demand that they be allocated a portion (in the *jiri*) of their wish to harvest. Though with the formation of Government of National Unity (GNU) in February 2009 political relations between members of different political parties were improved, some members of the community, especially those from the former ruling ZANU (PF), still felt better placed and more unequal than others. This impacts negatively on the *jiri* conservation practices as it has the potential of distabilising the long enduring conservation system in the Norumedzo. As one interlocutor, Mbuya Tevedzai confirmed, from a cultural perspective, such actions as those of Mr Paradzai have the potential to anger *vadzimu* and *mbondoro* whose wrath can cause *harurwa* to migrate from the *jiri* (see also Bourdillon, 1987).

Interference and fear of some community members by others, and political activism of some members were among the main causes of village tensions and conflicts in the Norumedzo

Communal Area. National Party politics were not the sole cause of tensions and conflicts among members of Norumedzo Community. Chieftainship succession conflicts were also a threat to the community's social harmony. In fact during fieldwork I came to realise that when researching with a people, there are certain things which you will only come to know after a long time when the people you are researching with (research companions) are now confident that you are not only a researcher but part of them. It was only after staying for seven months in the Norumedzo that I was told of a 15 year political crisis among the Norumedzo people as they were fighting against each other for chieftainship. This period was reported to be from the second half of 1993 to end 2008. In principle, the succession conflicts ended when Chief Chapwanya Mukombe, with the interventions of the Ward [15] Councillor, District Administrator (DA) and Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), was elected as an acting chief in 2008. The Norumedzo chieftancy, thus, has been belied by serious chieftainship debates in the past two decades, with the 15 year crisis meaning that there was a power vacuum in the Norumedzo chieftainship.

The current Acting Chief, Mukombe and another member of the ruling family, Furanai Chikwariro, were the people in conflict between all these years, 1993 – 2008, as both of them claimed to be the legitimate chief. While it was known that the legitimate chief after Mr Mukombe's father died and was supposed to be Mr Furanai Chikwariro, Mr Mukombe contested the chieftainship. He argued that his father died mysteriously a few months after being installed – a death which Mr Mukombe believed was unnatural but 'doctored' or caused by other members of the ruling family who also wanted to be installed as chiefs. This alleged accusation and contestation resulted in hostility, divisions and sometimes fierce fighting between members of the community who backed Mr Mukombe and those who supported Mr Chikwariro. The issue was only resolved with the intervention of the District Administration Office and Zimbabwe Republic Police in 2008. Below is the historical tenure of the Norumedzo chieftainship from the time of Nemeso through the 1880s to date.

Historical tenures of the Norumedzo chieftainship from the time of Nemeso to date is presented in the Table 4 below.

Chief	Period Ruled	Years Ruled	Installer	Relationship of the installer with the stem

				(Nemeso)
Nemeso	Dates not known	Dates not known	Manenga	Uncle (Brother of Nemeso's mother)
Rapfirwa	Dates not known	Dates not known	Nemahwi ¹⁴	Eldest (son of Nemeso)
Rushambwa	Dates not known	No dates known	Nemahwi	Eldest son (of Nemeso)
Kuitira	1880- 1893	13	Nemaunga (Eldest son of Nemahwi)	Eldest grandson (of Nemeso)
Mutaurwa	1894-1904	10	Nemaunga	Eldest grandson (of Nemeso)
Muchena	1905-1913	8	Nemaunga's son	Eldest great grandson of Nemeso
Chirume	1915-1934	19	Nemaunga's son	Eldest great grandson of Nemeso
Makota Rushambwa	1935-1940	5	Nemaunga's son	Eldest great grandson of Nemeso
Chikukuku	1941-1948	7	Nemaunga's grandson	Eldest great great grandson

¹⁴ Nemahwi was the eldest son of Nemeso and the most senior headman of the Varumedzo. According to the Varumedzo culture (marked by Nemeso's words before his death), Nemahwi and his descendants are not allowed to be installed as Norumedzo chiefs. His responsibility (and that of his direct descendants) is to install chiefs (in consultation with the spirit mediums of the chiefdom) for the Varumedzo as well as to advise and control the installed chief's powers. Customarily, the installer is understood to be more powerful than the installed. This explains why Nemahwi being the eldest son of Nemeso (and indeed the most senior headman of the Varumedzo) could not be customarily installed as Chief Norumedzo.

				of Nemeso
Chinorwiwa	1949-1981	32	Nemaunga's grandson	Eldest great great grandson of Nemeso
Makota Mavengererwa	1982-1992	10	Nemaunga's great grandson	Eldest great great great grandson of Nemeso
Chapwanya Mukombe (Acting)	2008 – present		Not yet installed as a chief. He is from the line of Rapfirwa	

Table 4: Tenure for Norumedzo chiefs since the time of Nemeso

(Source: Fieldwork data 2012, and DA Office, Bikita)

Succession disputes are not peculiar to the traditional authority structures in the study area. Other scholars in Zimbabwe and elsewhere (Sicilia 2011; VijFhuizen and Makora 1998; Marongwe 2004; Dingake 1995; Fontein 2006) have reported similar disputes. Marongwe (2004: 206), for instance, reported chieftainship disputes and rivalry between and amongst neighbouring Chiefs surrounding the Marange Chiefdom in Manicaland, Zimbabwe which he says impacted on natural resource management, particularly grazing areas. Marongwe (ibid: 211) gives an example of one of the acting Marange Chiefs who refused to surrender the 'crown' (*nbumbi dzoushe*) to Chaita Marange due to internal conflicts. Fontein (2006: 28) also notes in view of chieftainship succession conflicts in Masvingo district: "Chieftainship succession is often very contested, and can cause deep divisions within clans". Elsewhere, Dingake (1995) also reports that succession disputes are common in Tswana chiefdoms among chiefs, sub-chiefs and headmen of the minority tribes in Botswana. In the Norumedzo, the disputes are mainly connected with the fact that traditional leadership positions are paid in Zimbabwe. As such, the position of traditional authority is not only competitive but associated with the pursuit of wealth, legitimacy and influence. In the case of the latter, due to a power vacuum between 1993 and 2008, the *jiri* was left 'unattended' as there was no [legitimate] chief to assert authority and administer activities of the *jiri*. This resulted in very small *harurwa* harvests and sometimes the

migration of the insects from the *jiri* to other areas, as the *vadzimu* were believed to be angered with the conflicts, among other things. As noted in the introduction, and chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation, failure to observe the traditional practices associated with *harurwa* and *jiri* conservation is believed to anger *vadzimu* and *mbondoro* whose wrath may cause the *harurwa* to migrate to other areas outside the *jiri*, thereby resulting in people losing one of their major sources of livelihood, *harurwa*.

Besides party politics and chieftainship succession conflicts, I observed that the District Administration Office's role in handling chieftainship succession issues was another cause of village tension and conflict in the Norumedzo Area. In Zimbabwe, Chiefs and the District Administrator (DA) work very closely, with the latter's primary role being that of administering the whole district including approving candidates for chieftainship and settling chieftainship succession conflicts whenever arise. Yet, in the case of Bikita District and Norumedzo Community in particular, the role of DA has become the source of discontentment and conflict – a bone of contention among the different parties involved in the chieftainship succession.

With the chieftainship succession conflicts in the Norumedzo ruling family, and in particular between Mr Furanai Chikwariro Norumedzo and Mr Chapwanya Mukombe Norumedzo, Chief Mazungunye – a great grandson of the younger brother to Nemeso the forefather of the Norumedzo people who is currently the Paramount Chief for the Norumedzo people – had become reluctant to recommend a Chief for the Norumedzo people to the District Administration Office. In fact since the 1975 attempt to legitimise the independence of the Norumedzo chieftainship, which was disrupted at the height of the liberation struggle (Plowden 1978), it is alleged that Chief Mazungunye had been cheating the Norumedzo people by preventing the Norumedzo chief from being legitimised by the government of Zimbabwe. Chief Mazungunye is also allegedly accused by some Norumedzo people for taking advantage of the chieftainship succession conflicts in the Norumedzo ruling family to prolong the installment of a chief (the Norumedzo Chief). This is so as to continue benefitting in terms of tributes (by subjects) and fines (by those convicted in traditional courts). Mazungunye, knowing that his forefather was a younger brother to Nemeso – the forefather of the Norumedzo people, is allegedly afraid that once a chief is installed, the Norumedzo people can fight back for total independence. They can also contest for the Mazungunye chieftainship itself as they are also the legitimate sons and daughters of the Mazungunye ruling family. For these reasons, once the Norumedzo chieftainship is legally and legitimately installed by the government of Zimbabwe, Mazungunye would lose all the benefits he has been enjoying as Paramount chief for the

Norumedzo people. One of the Norumedzo chieftainship contestant, Mr Tinoda (not his real name), explained:

Mazungunye's forefather being a younger brother to Nemeso, our forefather, knows for certain that he has no right to rule us. Our chief here is independent just like any other chief in Bikita such as Budzi, Ziki, Mukangamwi, Mabika, including Mazungunye himself. Knowing this, Mazungunye's fear is that once a chief is installed for us we will refuse being ruled by him. That way, Mazungunye knows he will lose all the benefits (from the Norumedzo people) he has been enjoying all these years. He is, therefore, taking advantage of the internal chieftainship conflicts we are having here, and is alleged to be bribing and influencing the DA not to support our request for an independent chief.

While both parties contesting for chieftainship in Norumedzo blamed Chief Mazungunye and the District Administrator (DA), Mr Senza, during my discussion with the latter it was revealed that the reason why his office could not approve the candidate for Norumedzo chieftainship is that two candidates were being presented for the same post. Yet, according to customary law, the ruling family should agree on and present to the DAO only one candidate for chieftainship. It was also confirmed (as I had already been told in the field) that Mr Chikwariro and Mr Mukombe were contesting for Norumedzo chieftainship. Given that during fieldwork I stayed at a neutral independent institution (Machirara High School), I had the privilege to interact and interview members from either of the contesting parties. It was revealed from my informal conversation and interviews with the aforementioned members (including Mr Chikwariro and Mr Mukombe themselves) that the source of the chieftainship contestation was that the father of Mr Mukombe died mysteriously a few months after being installed as Chief. His death was, therefore, believed to have been caused by some members of the rival ruling family. That being the case, Mr Mukombe and his close family members considered their father not having ruled, thereby contesting against Mr Furanai Chikwariro who was supposed to be installed after the death of Mr Mukombe's father. Mr Senza thus lamented the situation in the Norumedzo:

It is really a pity that my office can be blamed for extending chieftainship problems in Norumedzo, but the situation is really beyond our control. In fact my office and Chief Mazungunye are only blamed for doing the right thing, customarily and legally as we cannot support two candidates for one and the same chieftainship post. There is therefore little we can do in terms of mediation until the Norumedzo people themselves get organised and present one candidate for their chieftainship position.

Yet, as the DAO supported Chief Mazungunye's position that the Norumedzo should present only one candidate for chieftainship, this became the source of dissatisfaction and conflict for the two camps contesting for chieftainship in the Norumedzo. Both camps felt they should have

the prerogative to have their candidates installed, thereby creating a very difficult situation for the DA and the elders and spirit mediums as the mediators in issues of chieftainship succession. One *svikiro* (spirit medium), Sekuru Taurai (not his real name) confirmed this difficulty:

The issue of chieftainship succession here in Norumedzo is also troubling us as spirit mediums. We have tried to intervene but you know where the death of a chief was mysterious, problems always arise. The respect commanded by chiefs and the hefty salaries received thereafter also helped ignite the succession conflict. Yet the way the two contestants are handling the issue of the Norumedzo chieftainship angered the ancestors a long time ago. And neither of the two will ever rule – they have lost favour of the ancestors. That's why there is a power vacuum for all this long. Remember the last legitimate chief of the Varumedzo died in 1992 and up until now no new chief has been installed. Ancestors support neither of the two candidates fighting for chieftainship and so will not allow either of them to rule this land.

As noted by Sekuru Taurai, the fact that a chief, once installed, commands great respect from his or her subjects, and also receives a hefty salary from the government, is one other reason why there is a stalemate in the Norumedzo chieftaincy. As reported by Ranger (2001), the hefty increments following President Mugabe's 1999 public apology for neglecting chiefs since independence saw the allowances for the chiefs and headmen being increased respectively from Z\$2,083 to Z\$10,000 and Z\$680 to Z\$5,000 per month between the period 1999 and 2001. Other benefits such as electrification of the chiefs' houses as well as water supplies, brand new trucks and free fuel for personal use also followed. Yet, I should be quick to note that though chieftainship succession conflicts in the Norumedzo had started six years earlier (in 1993), the fact that chiefs in Norumedzo (as elsewhere in Zimbabwe) command some considerable respect and obeisance from their subjects (see also Vaughan 2003) and have always been on the payroll even before the 1999 review of their social status by the government, could *partly* explain why the political impasse in the Norumedzo chieftainship has been so difficult to unlock.

From an environmentalist's perspective, it is worth mentioning that the tensions and differences between the two camps (of Mr Furanai and Mr Mukombe), since they started in 1993 to date, have had detrimental effects to conservation practices in the *jiri*. In fact, the conflicts spilled over into activities to do with *harurwa* harvesting and the *jiri* conservation practices, as I explain further in chapter 5. In the next section, I focus on the [visible] impacts of chieftainship succession conflicts to *jiri* conservation and *harurwa* harvests.

Potential threats and visible impacts of chieftainship succession conflicts and politics on conservation in Norumedzo

It is worth noting that whatever form conflict takes, it is likely to have several impacts which may include physical harm to humans, other beings and the natural resource base, psychological harm to humans, deterioration on productivity levels and a negative change in conservation practices. This chapter highlights the impacts of conflicts on environment and conservation of natural resources in Norumedzo Communal Area. If my fieldwork is anything to go by, I observed these impacts to include the destruction of some parts of the *jiri*, de-valorisation of cultural sites, and diminishing in *harurwa* harvests.

As highlighted above, resource management in Norumedzo Communal Area, particularly in the Norumedzo *Jiri*, has been negatively affected by different factors such as party politics and chieftainship succession conflicts to the extent that some parts of the *jiri* were damaged and encroached upon by family members of those who contested chieftainship. The collective resource conservation practices in the Norumedzo – what scholars such as Katerere (1999) and Murombedzi (2003) may characterise as Organic Community-Based Natural Resource Management (OCBNRM) and not CBNRM as used in the Southern African context with reference to outside led interventions – were affected in one way or another. As given by Murombedzi (2003: 12), CBNRM as used in the Southern African context with reference to outside led interventions “generally defines a wide range of interventions that are designated to improve the management of natural resources in communal tenure regimes, through the devolution of certain rights to these resources and for the ostensible benefit of the owners and thus managers of these resources”. I have demonstrated in this dissertation (see chapter 3) that this definition does not fit conservation in Norumedzo which is common pool resource management or OCBNRM (as understood by Katerere and Murombedzi) and not imposed CBNRM or assisted CBNRM. Conservation as practised in Norumedzo Communal Area has the implication that the owners, in this case the Norumedzo people (those living near the resources), are themselves “prosumers” (Buscher 2013) in so far as they are managers and users of natural resources in their area. As such, the continued existence of these resources largely depends on the philosophies they themselves create/design to continue managing their resources in a sustainable manner.

Due to chieftainship succession conflicts outlined above, conservation in the *jiri* was disrupted. During my daily visits in the *jiri* I observed some pathological manifestations in the forest, as quite a number of trees had been damaged and with small to large cankers around

them. When inquired who and when the damage was done, it was revealed that most of the damage took place during the 15 year chieftainship succession crisis, a period that resulted in a conservation crisis and that is the deepening and crippling daily conservation practices in the Norumedzo *Jiri*. Commenting on how *harurwa* harvesting in the *jiri* was done during this time of crisis, one *harurwa* policemen, Mr Todza (not his real name), a Norumedzo resident and *harurwa* trader in his forties dropped his tears lamenting:

It was real war in the jiri, particularly between members of the community in Mr Mukombe's camp and those in Mr Chikwariro's camp. Even harurwa in the jiri could understand that war was raging on in the jiri and beyond. During this period, there was virtually no control in the harvesting of harurwa and exploitation of other resources in the jiri. The trees that sheltered the harurwa could be damaged any time. Traditional harvesting methods such as the use of harvesting sticks (gokowonho) and harvesting baskets (tswanda) were disregarded as most of the people used big stones to shake the trees that sheltered harurwa. The result was this damage you see on the trees. Some trees have already recovered since the 'traditional' guarding of the jiri resumed in 2008, but others especially the vulnerable wild loquats trees (mizhanje/Uapaca kirkiana) have dried up.

It was evident from the vignette above and the facial expression of Mr Todza that, as with many other local community members I interviewed in the Norumedzo, had strong emotional attachment to the *jiri*. This was evidenced by his lamentations – the tears he dropped over the 15 years of conflicts in the Norumedzo which inflicted great damage to the *jiri*.

Also, from the observations and reports by my interlocutors, the adage that “*panorwa mabburu sora ndiro rinokuvara/lit: when bulls fight, it is the grass that suffers*” became apparent. The prolonged chieftainship succession conflicts had resulted in the damage of many trees, the habitat of *harurwa*, in the *jiri*. Besides the internal turmoil the Norumedzo Communal Area went through, paradoxically, the *jiri* was still able to build a positive reputation for itself externally. Norumedzo *Jiri* continued to play a leading role in resource conservation in south-eastern Zimbabwe, as people from other parts of Southern African region such as Mozambique and South Africa continue visiting the area for *harurwa*.

It should, however, be noted that the conservation practices used for generations to conserve natural resources in the *jiri* were strained and compromised thereby undermining the *jiri's* potentialities as some of the trees were damaged beyond recovery. This confirms Swartz's (1968) observation that when a conflict arises, there is a momentous turning point in the relations between components of a political field. As regards the Norumedzo *Jiri* conservation culture, this turning point occurred in 1993 when chieftainship succession conflicts between Mr

Mukombe and Mr Chikwariro started. Below are pictures (figure 15) of some of the trees that my interlocutors reported were damaged during the 15 years chieftainship succession conflicts.



Figure 15: Trees with old cankers that were sustained during chieftainship crisis in the Norumedzo

The other critical impact of village tension and chieftainship succession conflicts was desecration of cultural sites. By desecration, I mean disrespecting by humans of the historical/cultural values associated with cultural sites or sacred places, such as large trees of particular species (see also Garbett 1969; Mawere 2013b), burial sites (see also Matowanyika 1991), caves of historical significance (see also Nhira and Fortmann 1993), and pools or springs believed to be home to mermaids (see also Ranger 1999): it is undermining the legitimacy of beliefs in cultural norms associated with particular plant species, burial sites and pools. I should argue, here, that as far as my observations during fieldwork could tell, chieftainship succession conflicts in the Norumedzo did not only result in the damage of trees in the *jiri*, but also devalorisation and desecration of historical/cultural sites such as *mapa* (caves where Norumedzo ancestral Chiefs were buried) and wells in the area. In fact, the chieftainship succession struggle

between pro-Mukombe and pro-Chikwariro partisans between 1993 and 2008 was blamed for undressing the sacred sites (*kufugura zviera*) bordering the *jiri* such as Nemahwi and Rumedzo by encroaching on the mountains. In the case of both Rumedzo and Nemahwi mountains, the original boundaries of these sacred mountains have been shifted due to encroachment mainly by those from the Chikwariro camp since the beginning of the power struggles in 1993. See pictures below (figure 16) of newly built houses encroaching on the mountains.



Figure 16: Newly built homes encroaching on the mountain

The mountains which were considered sacred since the time of the first known inhabitants in the area have been tampered with in a way that has depleted the mountain's resources (through deforestation by those who encroach on the mountain) and undressed the sacred sites therein. As Mr Maga (not his real name), one of the elderly local member and *harurwa* administrators for 2012 recounted:

We grew up here knowing that Rumedzo Mountain is sacred. The sacredness goes back as far as the time of Nemeso. Since his time, I think in the 1800, rain petitioning ceremonies (mikweerere) and other traditional

rituals were done on this mountain under the guidance of traditional leaders and spirit mediums. Before and during the liberation struggle for independence in this country, Rumedzo was so sacred that ancestral lions (mhondoro dzevadzimu or simply mhondoro) were often seen by offenders or violators of cultural beliefs relating to the mountain and the resources therein. At Tsimbe raNemeso (Nemeso's pool), for example, we used to see mermaids with white clothes out on trees and rocks. Even after independence in 1980, everything in relation to tradition was so intact such that Nemeso's 'sacred' pool did not dry up even during the 1992 historical drought due to chivanhu – cultural norms – associated with it. Many things changed between 1993 and 2008 when there were chieftainship succession wrangles which left a power vacuum with no one to administer cultural beliefs relating to the sacred sites. People especially from the contesting families started to encroach on the mountain area. They destroyed trees at the bottom of the mountain and on the mountain slopes as you can see. This depleted resources on the mountain and undressed the sacred sites (kufugura zviera) on the mountain. Today, though traditional ceremonies such as rain petitioning are still being held on the mountain, Rumedzo, the mountain is no longer as sacred as it used to be.

Village tensions and chieftainship succession conflicts are not the only factors to blame for prompting the de-valorisation and desecration of historical sites in Norumedzo. Rather, the Norumedzo people reported village tension and chieftainship succession conflicts as having the major visible impact on the de-valorisation and desecration. However, they also mentioned other factors such as entrenchment of Christianity, economic hardships, population increase, westernisation and immigration. This is not new given that the latter factors are also captured elsewhere by some scholars (see also Nhira and Fortmann 1993; Bac 1998; Dzingirai 1994; Mukamuri et al 2003; Matowanyika 1991; Marongwe 2004; Matose 2002) as threats to common property management in rural communities. Matose (2002), for example, observes that “immigrants are less likely to follow sacred practices of settlers given their differences in ethnicity and culture. Likewise, different religious groupings, particularly Christians, generally do not follow sacred practices of settlers and sometimes even contest them”. Bac (1998) cites population increase as the main factor decreasing individual ability to comply with local institutions that govern common property resources. Similarly, Mukamuri, Campbell and Kowero (2003) identify economic challenges as another threat to the de-valorisation (and even desecration) of traditional regulations that seek to protect trees and woodlands, as in some areas unemployment is causing many youths to turn to wood cutting for selling as a survival strategy, thereby violating traditional rules by sometimes felling sacred trees.

Major impacts of village tensions and chieftainship succession conflicts in Norumedzo were felt in *harurwa* harvests. From what I observed during fieldwork, there is a sense in which one could say that besides negatively impacting on conservation of the *jiri* and cultural/historical

sites, chieftainship succession conflicts in the Norumedzo have impacted on the *harurwa* harvests in the *jiri*. Given that during the 15 year chieftainship succession conflicts there was a power vacuum in enforcing traditional sanctions and conservation strategies in the *jiri*, *harurwa* in the *jiri* became scarce and harvests diminished.

From the data I gathered during fieldwork, it was revealed that during the 15 year chieftainship succession crisis in Norumedzo, *harurwa* harvests diminished for two major reasons. Firstly, people used stones instead of harvesting sticks (*gokowonho*) to shake trees that sheltered *harurwa*. *Harurwa* favour quiet conditions and left the *jiri* to scatter in the surrounding regions. This made it difficult for *harurwa* catchers to harvest the insects as *harurwa* can only be easily harvested when they are in one place such as *jiri*. Secondly, the failure to follow traditional sanctions, such as *harurwa* ceremony and traditional harvesting methods, angered the ancestors causing *harurwa* harvests to diminish. This is because in the Norumedzo resource management regime, taboos and other sacred controls are central in ensuring that people respect resource management practices in the area. It is believed that any misuse of the Norumedzo *Jiri* or resources therein results in misfortunes to befall the offender or the entire community. There is a story about one white man who in the 1960s made some attempts to fence the Norumedzo *Jiri* without following the proper traditional procedures, and all the *harurwa* migrated from the *jiri*. This story, as with the *jiri* practices, is wide-spread and is narrated by almost every adult member of the Norumedzo Community.

A *harurwa* ceremony is a request (by the Norumedzo people) to their ancestors that they can direct all the *harurwa* to one place. That place is the *jiri*, which was set aside for the *harurwa* to thrive in. Also, the traditional harvesting methods derived from local wisdom are non-violent which makes *harurwa* feel comfortable in the *jiri* given that they are quite environment loving insects (for further details see introduction and chapters 1 and 2 of this dissertation). As one respondent, Mrs Tauya, narrated:

The 15 year chieftainship succession conflicts caused the greatest and unbearable suffering to the Norumedzo people. Everyone's source of livelihood was threatened as the ancestors were angered thereby causing harurwa to migrate from the jiri to scatter in the forests in the surrounding region. Some youths who before the crisis depended on harurwa had to migrate to South Africa for employment as there was nothing now to survive on. The suffering that all of us experience is the one that pushed us to send a delegation to go and ask for intervention of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) in the district. They came and held a peaceful meeting which harmonised the two conflicting parties. It was only after the ZRP's intervention that normal harvesting in the jiri resumed.

In other parts of rural Zimbabwe, appeal to externals (people or institutions), what Dzingirai and Madzudzo (1999) call “big men” – and police officers as in the case of Norumedzo – when a conflict arises between two social groups (or even members of the same social group) is not unique to Norumedzo. Dzingirai and Madzudzo (1999: 91) aptly capture this with reference to their studies in Matabeleland when they say:

When disputes break out, competitors approach outsiders. The disputants rarely make use of local institutions to resolve their conflict. In Binga, the Ndebele immigrants sourced the services of regional politicians when their claim to the land was questioned. Similarly, in Bulilimangwe, the cattle owners sought, amongst others, the services of senior national politicians when Campfire threatened to put an end to their unregulated use of the range. Likewise, in Tsholotsho locals approached the provincial administrators and the media when their stake to land became threatened by Campfire.

Due to local level or village level conflicts, the community’s resource base is compromised. In the case of Norumedzo, though no actual measurements in terms of quantities of *harurwa* harvested annually were given, data gathered during fieldwork was sufficient enough to show that chieftainship succession conflicts impacted negatively on *harurwa* harvests in the *jiri*, especially during the period in which the conflicts occurred.

Based on collective daily practices in the current conservation activities in Norumedzo especially before and after the 15 year crisis explained above, it can be argued that conservation efforts are only undertaken by local people if the benefits outweigh the costs (Murphree 1993). Evers (in Stiles 1995: 95) confirms this:

Participation by the ‘beneficiaries’ of a given project in its design, implementation and evaluation is a prerequisite for sustainability for several reasons. First, it is now recognised that indigenous technical knowledge is complex and sophisticated, and can provide a useful basis on which to build interventions. Second, many failures of previous projects can be attributed to their lack of response to local priorities and needs. Finally, establishing local rights and responsibilities constructs a pattern of long-term interests and incentives to engender a sense of ownership of project activities.

The argument by Evers above is germane to the Norumedzo Community’s conservation practices, which on the one hand have enabled the perpetuation of a long-standing management system of the *jiri* and *harurwa* as long as it benefits them. On the other hand, the [Norumedzo] community has reluctantly participated in the conservation efforts as long as the chieftainship

succession conflicts directly affected their utilisation of resources in the *jiri* in one way or another.

I conclude from this discussion that though chieftainship succession conflicts inhibited the impact of community management on the *jiri*, chieftaincy plays a significant role in managing the *jiri* and resources therein, especially *harurwa*. Thus, though most rural communities have complex local politics that can negatively impact on sustainable conservation of resources, daily conservation and management practices by local communities such as Norumedzo complement existing administrative structures in reinforcing effective collective community property management.

In the next chapter, I critically examine the perceived challenges and opportunities opened up by conservation practices in the *jiri* in terms of building [socio-economic] networks, protecting the forests, and improving human livelihoods and social cohesion. These are studied with a view to unravel the perceived impact(s) by local community members – both positive and negative – of conservation practices deployed by the Varumedzo.

CHAPTER 5: *Harurwa* and *Jiri*, Social Networks and Management Practices: The Opportunities and Challenges of Norumedzo *Jiri* Conservation

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the social networks generated by conservation practices in the *jiri*, and their effects in terms of forest protection, improving human livelihoods and social cohesion. These social networks are studied with a view to unravel the conservation practices deployed by the Varumedzo. Since I could not conclusively establish the opportunities opened up by the social networks during the period before my study, I explore in some detail the events, activities and perceptions of local people in Norumedzo Communal Area during the period I stayed in the area. Of particular interest are the challenges and constraints which impact on the conservation culture and relationships of different actors in the area. The chapter also discusses *harurwa* flows and economic markets locally (in Zimbabwe) and regionally, that is, in Southern Africa. This examination was done to determine the economic opportunities associated with the Norumedzo *Jiri*, and to explore and understand the influence of *harurwa* as a source of livelihood and economic contributor to local economies. The examination was also meant to contribute new perspectives on the impact(s) that *harurwa* have on the lives of people, especially those living in rural communities such as Norumedzo. As such, the chapter seeks to examine the opportunities opened up by the *jiri* conservation; to explore challenges that result from the existence of *harurwa* in Norumedzo, and to explore *harurwa* flows in Zimbabwe and in the Southern African region.

Harurwa and the challenges of the *jiri* conservation culture to the Norumedzo Community

As the adage goes “we learn from mistakes,” I found it important to study the challenges that confronted the Norumedzo *Jiri*, lives of the *harurwa* traders and the community at large “from the perspective of an outsider influenced by his interactions with *the insiders*” (Gledhill 2012: 233, emphasis original). Together with challenges confronting the *jiri*, the opportunities opened up for the Norumedzo community as a result of the conservation culture and the existence of *harurwa* in the area, were also examined. This was done with a view to give a non-biased and realistic picture of the *jiri* conservation culture as well as to examine the conservation practices and management strategies being deployed by the Varumedzo in protecting their forests.

When I first entered the *jiri* to participate with the *harurwa* harvesters and caretakers, I made several observations on how harvesting is done. I found out that *harurwa* harvesting can be done by any person, whether from the Norumedzo Area (Varumedzo) or not (non-Varumedzo), as long as one comes in time, that is, early in the morning to do the harvesting with many others. This observation resonates with my proposed [actor] network approach that I have tentatively named “engagement zones perspective,” a perspective I have argued has the merit that it at least succeeds in explaining the complex networks and cobwebs of relationships such as those found in the Norumedzo. Unlike relational ontology which gives primacy to relationships and substantive ontology which privileges entities or actors, “engagement zones perspective” accords primacy to both the entities and relationships. The primacy to both entities and relationships is, however, accorded in terms of the hierarchies in the order of beings (see introduction and chapter 3 of the present dissertation). In fact, different actors encountered each other in the *jiri* and their encounters, though voluntary, were broadly regulated by institutions and philosophies such as *bunbu/ubuntu*. The different actors’ behaviour, actions, and interactions with each other in the *jiri* were governed by the Varumedzo institutions and philosophies such as *bunbu*. This relates to Mario Blaser’s observations about the Yshiro people of northern Paraguay. Blaser observes that their territory known as the *yrimo* was governed by “the principle of relationality — that is, the mutual dependence of all that exists” (Blaser (2009: 13). In the *yrimo* as in the engagement zones, reciprocity or mutual dependence is fundamentally important to keep relational networks or the energy flows that sustain the relationships functional. The relational networks in the engagement zones (as in Blaser’s *yrimo*), thus, can be either productive or counter-productive depending on how the actors (whether human – human or human – other being) interact (or relate) with each other.

Also, I observed that all the people who came to do the harvesting appeared to be full of excitement and looked contented with the way harvesting was done. They would often cheer at each other as they harvest the *harurwa* and many of them made it a routine to do the harvesting every morning. It was only after a few weeks that I realised that some harvesters, (of generally all age groups and gender) were unhappy with the harvesting system in the *jiri*: indeed there were social tensions and dissatisfaction by some Norumedzo community members about the *harurwa* harvesting system in the *jiri*. In fact, there were different ways in which people viewed the conservation practices, and in particular the *harurwa* harvesting system, in the *jiri*. When I heard this part, I became very curious to know the reasons why other members discredited some of the *jiri* conservation practices given that they appeared to be transparent and effective in promoting

sustainability. Most of the harvesters were now familiar with me and could feel free to discuss some sensitive issues about *harurwa* and the *jiri*.

In my search for the reasons why some community members were not happy with the harvesting system in the *jiri*, seven major reasons were cited by some informants. These included damage of trees resulting in cankers; favouritism; structured theft; corruption and/or discrimination on the *harurwa dzebandauko* (some amounts of *harurwa* given to administrators and policemen by every harvester after a catch); cases of adultery; and school dropout and truancy by school children. In the paragraphs below, I focus on each of these challenges in some detail as the harvesters reported to me.

In terms of damage of trees, I had observed since I started visiting the *jiri* that there are a number of trees that have been damaged (as those presented in chapter 4) by what seemed to be stones. Most of these trees had old cankers. At first, I thought that the trees were damaged by *harurwa* harvesters during the harvesting season, but later I heard from *harurwa* administrators and policemen that the *jiri* is controlled throughout the whole *harurwa* season. I therefore, became more curious to examine what exactly might have caused and indeed was causing damage. I organised a focus group discussion with the *harurwa* administrators and the *harurwa* policemen as these are the primary people on guard of the *jiri*. They indicated that most of the trees are damaged by *harurwa* catchers/harvesters during the “free range period”, that is, during the time after which the *musasa* is burnt and deserted and *harurwa* season officially declared over. According to them, the *musasa* is normally destroyed and deserted (*kuparadzwa musasa*) around 25 August of every year, although during my fieldwork, it was destroyed earlier, on the 20th of July. The reason given was poor rainfalls received during the 2011 *harurwa* season as the insects feed on rainwater and morning dew. During the “free range period”, all *harurwa* administrators and *harurwa* policemen desert the *jiri*, leaving the people to harvest *harurwa* at will. Although people are constantly reminded by traditional leadership to deploy the traditional harvesting methods that are environmentally friendly such as the use of *magokowonho* (harvesting sticks) and *tswanda* (harvesting baskets), some harvesters capitalise on the free range period to use stones to shake trees (*kugumba*) during *harurwa* harvesting. Both the administrators and policemen expressed the difficulty associated with controlling behaviour of some community members who do not think about the future of the *jiri* and other generations to come. One of the *harurwa* policemen, Mr Taurai (not his real name) expressed his sentiments about harvesters who damage trees:

Even though people around here know that it is a taboo to harvest harurwa using stones and that if caught, the culprits pay a fine, they always try to find time when they secretly come harvesting illegally or when it is quiet in the

jiri so that they can use stones for a quick catch. This gets worse during 'free range period' – the period between August and October/ November – as people will still come to the jiri looking for harurwa left behind during the harvest season. They know that during this period, there is no strict control as we (the harurwa administrators and policemen) will have deserted the jiri. It is mostly during this period that majority of the trees in the jiri get damaged.

Problems associated with exploiting the commons are not unique to Norumedzo as they have also been recorded elsewhere by some scholars. Marongwe (2004), for example, shows how commercialisation and privatisation of natural resources have disrupted management and conservation of common pool resources, particularly of wild fruits in Hwedza District, Zimbabwe. Marongwe (ibid: 205 – 206, emphasis mine), thus, notes:

If not managed properly, commercialisation and privatisation of natural resources can lead to the disintegration of CBNRM. Yet it is known that in Zimbabwe, wild fruits that include the baobab (and wild loquats) have been highly commercialised. Most of the fruit is bussed from rural communities to major urban centres for resale ... The situation becomes worse in cases where there are weak CBNRM regimes. In the worst scenarios, community violence erupts. This was the case in the Hwedza district of Zimbabwe when a Chief in the area was severely assaulted by youths whom he had accused of selling mazhanje/wild loquats to external agencies at the expense of locals.

So, when it was confirmed that the trees are damaged by *harurwa* harvesters, I was curious to know whether the *harurwa* administrators and *harurwa* policemen believed that it was possible to stop the damage once and for all, especially during the free range period. With all the trees damaged in the *jiri*, I was surprised to observe that all administrators and policemen quickly agreed that it was possible to stop the damage once and for all if some strict measures were taken. One of the policemen, Mr Tagona explained:

Sure, it is possible to stop this bad habit of damaging trees which shelter our precious harurwa. In fact it was once proposed that the harurwa administrators and policemen stay in here (in the jiri) well until November when there are really no longer any harurwa in the jiri. The Chief agreed but the problem was on payment. Who will pay us? You know, this time when we are in here we are paid using harurwa. For example, we take turns to guard during the day, and for that service we are paid 2kg of harurwa each. This way, we manage to support our families back home and also to have the energy to continue doing work here. If there is no payment then what would we eat while guarding the jiri? How would we sustain our families?

The expressed above sentiments showed me that while networks were generated for the locals by the *jiri* and its conservation culture, the *jiri* also faced some challenges I will discuss below. It

was indicated by some policemen and administrators during focus group discussions that there might be a need for funding to pay *harurwa* administrators and policemen, especially during the free range period, that is, the period between August and November to complement traditional restrictions used in the conservation of the *jiri*. Yet, as highlighted in the introduction and chapter 3 of this dissertation, policing is not the only possibility for environment governance. Community connectedness through traditional institutions, traditional religion, and philosophies such as *ubuntu*, taboos used in everyday life (Decher 1997; Sheridan and Nyamweru 2008; Lye 1998; Marongwe 2004) in the Norumedzo Community have shown to be potentially helpful in enhancing collective responsibility in environment governance. I should comment, however, that such observations are not unique to the Norumedzo. Decher (1997), for example, observes that in Ghana, traditional religion, centred on a deity called Kpalevorgu, has been effective in the protection of groves which are rich in fruit trees and medicinal plants. The existence and flowering of the *jiri* in the area is a good example that through community connectedness local communities can sustainably manage their environments and foster forest protection.

Local level cases of adultery in the *jiri* especially during *harurwa* harvest season led to some negative perceptions on the *jiri* conservation. It was reported that some women (including some married women) and men were involved in sexual favours in exchange for *harurwa*. It could be argued that such acts put those involved in these dealings at the risk of being infected by the deadly HIV/AIDS. From my fieldwork, it was revealed that some *harurwa* policemen are the most active abusers of women as they take advantage of being in control of the *jiri* and of always having some *harurwa* even those days when they [*harurwa*] are difficult to catch. This is because *harurwa* policemen are given a share on almost daily basis. Revealing more on women abuse in the *jiri*, one *harurwa* policeman, Mr Ndoreva (not his real name) had this to say: “*Eh shamwari! Kushungurudzwa kwavanbukadzi muno mujiri kushoma chose asi kunoitika. Nekuda kwezyiera zvinozvivikanwa muno mujiri ndingangoti kushungurudzwa ikoko kunyanya kwavanbukadzi kushoma kana kurimo. Asi kunze uko (achinongedzera kunze kwejiri), ndine chokwadi chokuti kuri kuitika sokuti ini pachangu ndakatombosangana nako/* Eh my dear! Cases of women abuses are few here but exist. Because of the beliefs, myths and legends attached to the *jiri*, cases of abuse especially of women are very rare if any inside the *jiri*. But out there (pointing outside the *jiri*), I am sure the cases are many as I have witnessed others myself”. Mr Ndoreva went on to narrate his own experience when he used *harurwa* to commit adultery with the wife of another man. Before narrating his story, Ndoreva shook his head and continued:

Um! You know it was one morning when I was going home after a harvest. That day I didn't have the duty to stay on guard (of the jiri) during the day. I had a 5 kg packet full of harurwa. Just a few meters from the jiri, I met one woman – a married woman – coming from the jiri as well. When she saw me with my 5 kg she asked if I can give her some as she only had a handful in her small plastic paper. Jokingly, I replied, “What will you give me in return if I give you my harurwa?” “All what you want, even myself”, she answered. At first I thought she was joking only to believe it when she surprisingly drew nearer kissing me on my right cheek. I didn't know what happened next besides that I gave away about 3kg of my harurwa, and had intimacy with the woman. I only regretted afterwards as she was someone's wife, and we had unprotected sex.

Though no HIV/AIDS studies (as far as I can tell) have been done so far with the *harurwa* traders, if my fieldwork is anything to go by, there is a sense in which one can believe that there are cases of adultery or sexual favours in general in exchange for *harurwa* in the *jiri*.

Besides, corruption was reported as one among the list of the negative effects and challenges of the *jiri*. According to Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) Act section 2 of 2000, corruption includes vices like bribery, fraud and other related offences. The ICPC also sees corruption as the abuse of power or position of trust for personal or group benefit (monetary or otherwise). Similarly, corruption can be defined as “the misuse or abuse of public office for private gains” (World Bank 1997, 2000; Balboa and Medalla 2006). This means that corruption can come in various forms and a wide array of illicit behaviour, such as bribery, extortion, fraud, nepotism, graft, speed money, pilferage, theft, embezzlement, falsification of records, kickbacks, influence peddling, and campaign contributions (Klitgaard 1997). Important to note is the fact that while corruption is commonly attributed to the public sector, it also exists in other aspects of governance, such as political parties, private business sector, and NGO (USAID, Anti-corruption Strategy, 2005).

Corruption shows that corruption goes beyond financial involvement but includes moral behaviour, abuse of office for personal gain(s), electoral disobedience and so on, as well. Meanwhile, for purposes of this study, my major focus will be on corruption that revolves around abuse of office for personal gain(s) which is very injurious to development, whether at local or national level. The Longman Dictionary (2009: 390) defines corruption as “using one's power in a dishonest or illegal way in order to get an advantage to oneself”. Using this definition, I consider the use of power (whether financial, political or otherwise) by *harurwa* administrators and policemen in the *jiri* in a way that is dishonest and illegal traditionally or otherwise.

Corruption in the *jiri* has become widespread such that it is now difficult to deal with. As such, high prevalence of cases of corruption in the *jiri* has become one of the challenges

threatening the effectiveness of practices in the *jiri*. One of the *harurwa* catchers, Ms Ngwarai (not her real name) reported:

As for cases of corruption in the jiri, they are many, especially nowadays with the use of cell phones. You know what some harurwa policemen do when guarding harurwa in the jiri! They give excuses a day before so that they don't report for duty the next day. After this, they organise with the other policemen on duty who would tell them on telephone that you can go and catch in area X because no one is patrolling there. This normally happens when there is moonlight. The policemen in question will later on share the catch. So I can say that cases of corruption are many, but all the same they are not allowed and if caught conniving with catchers or being involved in any form of corruption they are called for hearing and punished. If the case is 'big', then the harurwa administrators will take it to the chief where they will be convicted and fined accordingly.

When I asked how corrupt activities in the *jiri* could be dealt with, some concerned members of Norumedzo community suggested that severe punishments to the culprits such as heavy fines or expulsion from the communal area can deter potential culprits.

The other challenge confronting the *jiri* was structured/organised theft and favouritism by some *harurwa* policemen and *harurwa* administrators. Some *harurwa* administrators, for example, were allegedly reported to sometimes connive with some *harurwa* catchers to evade paying *harurwa dzebandauko* (a token of appreciation) to the *jiri* policemen and *harurwa* administrators, which can be classified as structured theft or favouritism depending on how it is done. Explaining how structured theft, nepotism, and favouritism in the *jiri* are normally done, one *harurwa* policeman, Mr Tofa's (not his real name) comment captures the message from most interlocutors when the topic of structured theft, nepotism and/or favoratism were introduced in interviews:

Sometimes when policemen go out with people to do harvesting, they organise with some of the latter not to pay some harurwa dzebandauko after the catch. As you know, after catching everyone should give harurwa dzebandauko to the harurwa administrators, these policemen connive with the catchers that after a catch the latter are let go without giving any harurwa to the administrators. These are normally the policemen's wives, friends and other relatives. Given that it is the obligation of the policemen to arrest or report any act of misconduct by harurwa catchers to administrators, those involved in structured theft and favouritism normally go unscathed.

Such discrimination and structured incidents of theft pose challenges on the issue of resource exploitation and conservation in the *jiri*. It has also resulted in some local residents perceiving the Norumedzo *Jiri*, negatively or at least as a system favouring those in administration.

Also, while *harurwa* in the Norumedzo Community have become the major source of livelihood for all the people in the area, it has met with another serious challenge, that of truancy

and dropout of school children. During my daily research visits in the *jiri*, I identified a number of children of primary and secondary school-going age, most of whom lying to me that they were attending school. I noticed that these children were always around in the *jiri* during weekdays. I soon realised that some of these children were absenting themselves from school most of the days while others had already dropped out of school. One vivid example is that of Joseph (not his real name), a 12 year old boy of Primary School going age. When I first met him in the *jiri* harvesting *harurwa*, I just wondered if he attended school as it was on a Tuesday. I became curious to know if he attended school at all. As I observed and participated in the *harurwa* harvesting, I greeted him in a friendly manner. I wanted him to be as close to me as possible. I was happy to have an opportunity to ask him if he was attending school. “Yes, I am in grade 6 at Mbirashava Primary School”, he answered but timidly. In the next three days, I was surprised to see him in the *jiri* again. I observed him closely and noticed that his palms had already turned orange which in itself was a sign that Joseph was a *harurwa* daily harvester. I became more curious to see if Joseph was indeed attending school. I hatched a plan. I wanted to visit Joseph’s parents and see how they lived. I asked him if he was staying with his parents at home. He told me, he was staying with a grandmother and a sister as his mother had remarried after divorcing with his father.

After that day’s harvest, I asked Joseph if we could visit his grandmother together, and he agreed. It was around 10 am when we arrived at the compound of Joseph’s grandmother, a cheerful Gogo vaJose (Joseph’s grandmother)! We greeted each other before I introduced myself and asked her if we could talk. “*Ngatipinde mumba mwanangu kana wuine mashoko aunoda kupangana neni/* Let’s get inside house my son if you have some words you want to share with me”, she said. We discussed some other issues before I could start my story. This was to make Gogo vaJose feel comfortable. During this discussion I learnt that Joseph’s sister, Svodai was a divorcee and had dropped out of school when she was in grade 5. Unfortunately, that day she was away from home. I then asked her if Joseph attended school. She shook her head before she could explain:

Ah, Joseph! He dropped out of school when he was still in grade 4, some two years ago. He said it’s better to stay in the jiri catching harurwa than going to school. I tried my best to make him stay in school, but it became apparent that he just followed her sister, Svodai’s footsteps. That one (Svodai) dropped out of school when she was in grade 6 to specialise in harurwa harvesting and selling, before she got married to a harurwa policeman. She only wanted harurwa from him [the harurwa policeman] as they divorced a few weeks after his husband retired from pikiti. Her reason for divorcing was her husband no longer brings any harurwa home for the family as he used to do when he was still a harurwa policeman.

Joseph who was accompanying our conversation all this time was ashamed of the lies he had told me. When I asked Joseph why he dropped out of school, he was truthful this time. “I wanted to catch *harurwa* so that I can sell them and get money to buy what I want,” he replied. The story of Joseph is one among many others that are common in the Norumedzo Community. Confirming this observation, Mr Uriga – a teacher at a local secondary school and one of my research assistants narrated his experiences in the Norumedzo Area:

Since I started teaching at Machirara in 2007, I observed that harurwa is the major source of livelihood for the Norumedzo people. However, the existence of harurwa in Norumedzo has also impacted negatively on the lives of some local people. Over the years, I have observed that during harurwa season some of the students from the surrounding area either absent themselves or drop out of school to concentrate on harurwa catching. Those students that are either rebellious or lack guidance normally drop out of school to have enough time to catch harurwa, sometimes to come back to school after harurwa season.

Mr Uriga’s observations and the story of Joseph, as well as many others I heard in the community during fieldwork showed that though *harurwa* was a treasury and the major source of livelihood for the Norumedzo people, it also impacted negatively on some local members, as is the case of Joseph.

Last but not least in terms of the challenges that *harurwa* brings to the Norumedzo Community is the reputation that *harurwa* have as unhygienic during harvesting, because they stain harvesters’ hands. During my fieldwork, I observed that all *harurwa* harvesters except those who used harvesting baskets (*tswanda*) had their palms turning orange in colour. Some of the harvesters also had some wounds on their palms caused by *fuve* (allomones/*harurwa* toxin) excreted by *harurwa* as defensive mechanism during harvesting. Below (figure 17) is a photograph of a harvester’s palms that have been seriously affected by *fuve*:



Figure 17: Palms of a harurwa harvester that have been adversely affected by harurwa fuve

The *fuve* is acidic and sour and can cause temporary blindness if it gets in contact with one's eye. The harvesters have, however, developed mechanisms to instantly overcome the temporary blindness once their eyes get into contact with *harurwa* allomones (*fuve*) – they simply put some saliva in the eye which instantly clear away the liquid.

When I asked if there was no traditional way of removing the orange colour from their palms, they said they use lemon liquid (citric acid), but it is not all that effective. One of the harvesters, Mrs Karambu (not her real name), had this to say:

Harurwa can cause serious damage to the skin, especially palms if you use unprotected hands during harvesting. To remove the fuve, one can wash his/her hands with citric acid. Some people wear plastic gloves before they start catching. However, the rate of catching is compromised if one decides to use gloves. As a result, not many catchers use gloves. Also, if the liquid excreted by harurwa gets into contact with your eyes, you instantly become blind though the blindness is temporary and can be treated by using saliva.

Thus, while *harurwa* is the major source of livelihood for the Norumedzo Community and other communities in south-eastern Zimbabwe, the effects they normally have on harvesters' skin and eyes remains a challenge.

Perceived opportunities opened up by the Norumedzo *Jiri*

The previous sections show the negative impacts and/or challenges associated with the Norumedzo *Jiri* as perceived by the Norumedzo people themselves. In this section, I present the perceived opportunities opened up by the *jiri*, especially from both the Varumedzo and the researcher's perspective. Both the Varumedzo and the researcher's perspectives are important in that they add to an emerging stream of anthropological writing which considers "insider" point of view seriously and in a different way from anthropological traditions "that accepted the ultimate validity of the epistemological and ontological premises of Western modernity" (Gledhill 2012: 233) while disregarding the worldviews of the [indigenous] communities studied. In fact, I wanted to make an attempt to strike a balance between the outsider (my own perspective as a researcher) and the insider's (the Varumedzo) perspective, but without privileging either [perspective] at the expense of the other.

From my fieldwork data, it was revealed that between the period from 2008 to date, and since the inception of *jiri* conservation culture during the time of Nemeso some centuries ago until the early 1990s, most of the local people have generally perceived the Norumedzo *Jiri* as a success story of natural resource conservation. In this study, as I will show in the ensuing sections, I use various indicators that include harvest records, perceived [positive] impacts of the *jiri* on local people's livelihoods, people's stories and the current state of conservation culture in the *jiri* to show whether the thesis that the Norumedzo *Jiri* could be generally considered as one among few successful stories of conservation cultures by local communities could be justified. Acknowledging this point, the eldest son of Chief Norumedzo, Cosmas Mazive Mukombe Norumedzo, reported:

I should believe that Norumedzo Jiri though with its own challenges is one of the few areas in Zimbabwe where we (the local people) have managed to conserve our own natural resources for this long using our local daily practices (chivanhu¹⁵ chedu). Um ..., the conservation strategies we are using to conserve our jiri are those that were passed on to us by our forefathers since the time of Nemeso, the 'causer' (mukonzeri) of the precious insects, harurwa we all depend on in this area. The strategies are based on our long living philosophy (mararamire edu

¹⁵ For more on *chivanhu*, see glossary of terms; see also chapter 2 of the present dissertation.

echivanhu) of ubuntu (chivanhu) which teach us to live in harmony not only with other humans, but with other creatures and the environment in general. While the jiri has already put us on the national map, I would like to believe that with researchers continually coming in from different areas, our jiri will put us on the world map.

This perception was shared by many other locals during my fieldwork in the Norumedzo. Of particular interest is Takunda's perception. Takunda, from Mugumisi village in Norumedzo and a former student at Machira Secondary School had this to say when I asked him about what he perceives to be the importance of *jiri*:

For me our jiri here is important in a number of ways. For example, most of the people around this community depend on harurwa for their livelihoods. Personally, my school fees are paid from the proceeds obtained from harurwa sales. Besides, I have seen quite a number of people from different places, some say they come from as far as South Africa to buy harurwa. This means that our jiri is not only helping us to generate income and sustain our livelihoods but also to put us on the national and even regional map.

In this section, I examine in detail the opportunities that were said to have been opened up (for the Varumedzo) as a result of the conservation culture in the Norumedzo *Jiri*.

Livelihoods, poverty alleviation and social networking

Zimbabwe has high levels of poverty especially in rural communities where facilities are not only poor but scarce (see The Global Fund 2005; Poverty Reduction Forum Trust 2013). Poverty in rural communities of Zimbabwe has resulted in many rural people engaging in diverse sources of livelihoods such as farming. By livelihood, I mean the *means*, activities, entitlements, assets by which people do make a living – income, food, shelter and clothing (WCED 1987; Chambers and Conway 1992; see also Mawere 2013). The *means* in this case may include natural or biological (for example, land, water, common property resources, flora, fauna), social (such as community, family, participation, empowerment) and human (for example, knowledge, skills) resources which help rural communities to meet their livelihood goals. Yet, with erratic rainfall received in the region since the last two decades and the rising cost of farming tools and inputs such as seed and fertiliser, farming has become unprofitable and an unreliable form of livelihood for many people in the rural areas in Zimbabwe. In the Norumedzo Area, for example, the locals have depended much on *harurwa* harvesting and selling for their livelihoods. For many of them, *harurwa*, unlike farming, is a more reliable form of livelihood as they are harvested annually and for the longer period of the year, that is March to September. Also, *harurwa* require less labour

and a lower capital base than farming. As one *harurwa* dealer, Mrs Tafuma, remarked at the main local selling point at Nyika Growth Point:

Harurwa are an important reliable source of livelihood for us in the rural areas. We can afford to pay school fees for our children using income – money – from harurwa selling. You know, due to erratic rainfalls these days, farming is no longer a reliable and viable source of livelihood. And, harurwa harvesting is not as expensive as farming where one would need farm implements, seeds and fertilisers besides hard work involved in the activity. In fact, for harurwa harvesting, all one needs is to go to the jiri and do the harvesting once the season comes ... With harurwa, we are rest assured that we harvest them every year as long as the locals (in the Norumedzo area) continue observing traditional norms and values associated with harurwa.

At another *harurwa* selling point in the same district, Chikuku Business Centre about 25km from Nyika Growth Point, some respondents commented on the deliciousness, cheapness and nutritious value of *harurwa*. One *harurwa* ‘customer’, Jairos, at the business centre, for example, remarked: “*Harurwa is delicious and nutritious, yet it remains one of the cheapest sources of food in the ‘local’ market. This is why I like harurwa (laughing). Look! I have bought some I am enjoying here (showing me a handful of harurwa)*”.

At yet another local *harurwa* selling point, Roy Business Centre about 40km from Masvingo city, one *harurwa* trader, Monica, explained the advantages of *harurwa* over other food stuffs sold on the open market. When I approached her, she thought I was one of the potential buyers, and so she talked to me in a persuading and advertising manner giving me a few *harurwa* to test before I could buy:

You know there are many reasons why I like trading in harurwa. First, harurwa are favoured by many people who pass through this place as most of them are aware of the medicinal properties harurwa have. Second, harurwa are not as perishable as many food stuffs such as cooked meali-cobs, vegetables and fruits. Harurwa can stay for two weeks or so which makes it difficult to run a loss when in the harurwa business. Third, harurwa are a delicious and nutritious source of food and many people are aware of this fact. Because of these reasons, harurwa are easy to sell ... So, you can see why I am in the business of buying and selling harurwa?

To reiterate, during fieldwork I managed to visit several *harurwa* selling points in Masvingo Province, most of which in Bikita district where Norumedzo ward is located. These included the following: Nyika Growth Point, Maregere Business Centre, Mupamawonde Business Centre, Chikuku Business Centre, Bikita Business Centre, Makuvaza Business Centre, Zaka Growth Point and Gutu Growth Point. From the informal discussions and interviews I had with both *harurwa* sellers and ‘customers’, it was revealed that *harurwa* had penetrated most of the markets in Masvingo Province. In light of this data, I argue that the relational networks exhibited

between *harurwa* and *harurwa* traders (sellers and buyers) mirror my enhanced actor-oriented approach – the engagement zones approach. This is because the *harurwa* traders gave primacy to entities (*vanhu* – sellers and buyers –, institutions and *harurwa*) before they extended networks to *bushammwari* (relationships) with the entities in question. Put differently, *harurwa* dealers approached the issue of relational networks from the more concrete question of order of entities and institutions in terms of how they [entities such as *harurwa* and *vanhu* as well as institutions] are socially constructed and ordered in relation to each other. Before relating with the *jiri*, for example, harvesters would seek permission from traditional leadership (for further discussion on relational networks see chapter 3). It is this kind of relational networking that allowed the *harurwa* traders to deal with diverse actors (not only humans), and that *harurwa* found buyers and were consumed by people in the Southern African region's rural communities.

Based on data gathered during interviews with some senior residents such as Chief Norumedzo and focus group discussions in the Norumedzo Community, it was revealed that the *jiri* and in particular *harurwa* have always been the major source of livelihood, directly or otherwise, for most if not all the Norumedzo people. One female senior resident, Mrs Tawana, for instance, commented:

For us who were born and grew up here, harurwa is our life. Our forefathers, parents and ourselves today have always depended on harurwa. With harurwa we manage to send our children to school, to buy our groceries and even big things like goats and herds of cattle. In fact, harurwa is our gold here and I wonder how we will live if harurwa is extinct. I therefore wish to urge traditional leadership here to keep on enforcing traditional restrictions and beliefs about harurwa and the jiri practices.

Harurwa also enhances the status of women and their social networking in Norumedzo Area. One of the women, Ms Gozho, had this to say:

The existence of harurwa in this area helps greatly, especially to us women. You know some of our husbands do not work in towns. Others wake up just to go after beer. Harurwa is therefore a very important resource as most of us (women) rely on them for a living and even to enhance our socio-economic status in our society. We manage a lot of things, through harurwa sales, that make our husbands respect us even more. You know we buy blankets, groceries, televisions sets and radios, besides sending our children to school with the money we get from harurwa sales.

When I interviewed one of the *harurwa* policemen, Mr Gwenhure, in the *jiri* if they have any other source of livelihood besides *harurwa*, he said:

Well, there are other activities we engage in here [in Norumedzo] to earn a living such as gardening or farming in general. We, however, rely much on harurwa as they sustain us the larger part of the year, normally between March and September, that is, immediate before the rain season commences. We, therefore, only do serious farming during the time when there is completely no harurwa, that is, between October/November and February.

Such sentiments by some of the Norumedzo residents were sufficient to tell that while there might be challenges and constraints being faced in conserving the Norumedzo *Jiri*, the *jiri* was generally perceived as a natural resource that offered socio-economic opportunities for the Varumedzo.

Fight against land degradation

Besides being a source of livelihood, some residents acknowledged during fieldwork that the *jiri* is one example of how land degradation in rural areas could be reduced (for more details on land in Zimbabwean rural areas see Katerere et al 1991; World Bank 1993; Mukamuri 1995). While there has been a prevalent view, especially in the decade from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s by some scholars (Brundtland 1987; Leonard 1989) that due to poverty rural communities always participate in land degradation, this is contrary to what is happening to the Norumedzo Community. This is because despite the economic hardships that Zimbabwe has experienced over the years, the Norumedzo people have been able to sustain a long-standing conservation system for many generations mainly due to the existence of *harurwa* and the cultural traditions associated with them. As one of the respondents, Mbuya Tatenda (not her real name), noted during an interview: “*tototenda vadzimu vedu neharurwa dzavakadai kutipa dzinotichengetera masango. Muno deno tange tisina harurwa muno umu kana jiri irori tingadai tiinaro? Handitendi. Ukafamba munyasi umo musingaiti harurwa, unoona miti yakatemwatemwa*/We thank our ancestors for causing the existence of *harurwa* in this area. Do you think if we had no *harurwa* here we could have this flourishing Norumedzo *Jiri* today? I personally don’t think so because if go down there where *harurwa* do not habitat, there is serious deforestation going on”. This connotes that to treat all insects such as *harurwa* as insects not worthy of study is to erase the economic, political, social and ecological history of *harurwa*.

In Zimbabwe, and in particular the Norumedzo Area, the pivotal role of *harurwa* in local environmental practice is evident in the deliberate interventions that have been instituted to protect the natural forests. In their natural habitats, these insects are a source of livelihood and act as participants in forest conservation. The rural administrative authorities, that is, chiefs and

headmen in the Norumedzo, have institutionalised the conservation of the natural forests to ensure that a conserved forest locally named Norumedzo *Jiri* (Norumedzo Forest/Grove) has been reserved for the insects, *harurwa* to flourish. The *jiri* is “sacred” and people are constantly advised not to tamper with it through deforestation, starting forest fires, smoking in the forests, or unauthorised exploitation of the non-timber forest products. Tampering with the *jiri* is believed to anger ancestors who in return might cause the extinction of *harurwa*. Transgressors (those who tamper with the *jiri*) and those who exploit *jiri* resources without permission from the traditional authorities (chiefs/village heads) are reported by Chief Norumedzo’s policemen, and are tried and convicted by his traditional court. Those found guilty are fined according to the gravity of the crime.

Discussing how the management system in the Norumedzo *Jiri* could continue to adapt and thrive in the face of mounting political crisis and land pressure in Zimbabwe, Makuku (1993a, 1993b) gives three main reasons which all were confirmed by my respondents during fieldwork. First, the Norumedzo Community has maintained its traditional administrative structures/institutions which to date are still responsible for regulating resource exploitation and ensuring a sustained harvest from the *jiri*. Second, the Norumedzo *Jiri* and *harurwa* are based on strongly held cultural traditions, accepted norms and beliefs in the Norumedzo Community. Based on the cultural traditions, access to products in the *jiri* is open and each member is obliged to contribute to the management, thereby minimising conflict between community members. Third, although the authority to administer the communal resources such as the *jiri* is vested in the RDC, the Norumedzo people have maintained recognition and respect by offering gifts of *harurwa* to neighbouring chiefs, the district administrator and the police during *harurwa* season. A fourth reason that was stressed during my fieldwork was that *harurwa*, which thrive in the *jiri*, is the main source of livelihood for the people in Norumedzo Communal Area. Destroying the *jiri* is therefore the same as destroying the local people’s source of livelihood. Besides, the support by some government institutions such as the ZRP and EMA of the *jiri* conservation practices also contributes to the flourishing of the *jiri*. This means that a combination of all these reasons was important in ensuring the continued survival of traditional practices of *jiri* management and community management of forests to date. It is in view of these reasons that forest protection in the *jiri* has thrived over the years.

While other areas in south-eastern Zimbabwe such as Mukanganwi Communal Area are suffering land degradation and deforestation in varying degrees as locals extend their farmlands (see Mawere 2011a), the Norumedzo *Jiri* has for centuries now relatively remained as one of the

few success stories where community participation and bottom-up conservation could be credited for promoting forestry protection. The example of Norumedzo *Jiri*, therefore, confirms the view that the slow pace of skills transfer and transformation of environmental management skills to local communities, or rather, “poor community participation in many rural areas, is partly blamed for the loss of forests” in *Zimbabwe as elsewhere in Africa* (Mawere: 2011a: 09). It also puts into question a prevalent view in the decade from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s by some scholars and organisations (Brundtland 1987; Leonard 1989; World Bank 1992) that due to poverty, people in the rural areas can do nothing but participate in environmental degradation, thereby causing natural resource depletion. Brundtland (1987: 28), for example, had this to say:

Those who are poor and hungry will often destroy their immediate environment in order to survive: they will cut down forests; their livestock will overgraze grasslands; they will over use marginal land; and in growing numbers they will crowd into congested cities. The cumulative effect of these changes is so far-reaching as to make poverty itself a major global scourge.

Using the present case study (Norumedzo which is located in an African country – Zimbabwe – with relatively high poverty rates especially in the rural areas), this study thus challenges “the poverty as the cause of environmental degradation” proposition. In fact, during my fieldwork, I found out that large numbers of poor people in the Norumedzo “had been transformed into environmental activists due to their close relation to the ecosystems which recognised that the survival capacities of the poor are directly threatened by the environmental degradation” (Ellis 2000: 120). This resonates with Broad (1994) and Ellis’s (2000) findings using fieldwork data collected in rural communities across the Philippines (a country characterised by severe poverty rates) that challenged the thesis that poverty is the ‘real’ cause of environmental degradation and resource depletion in rural areas. This is evidence that where quick transformations and environmental management skills transfer to local communities, as in the case of Norumedzo, it is practically visible that more forests are protected.

In the case of the Norumedzo *Jiri*, the “local” people’s, enforcement of traditional restrictions, such as beliefs and taboos enforced through traditional leadership (the Chief and his headmen), have managed to conserve the area around the *jiri*. The area is characterised by dense vegetation with cool temperatures and less erosion. On stressing the point on how Norumedzo *Jiri* and the existence of *harurwa* therein have contributed to the fight against environmental degradation and also to “favourable” climatic conditions of the area, one senior resident, Mr Doro, aptly commented:

Harurwa have enabled people here to conserve the jiri. In turn the jiri gives us harurwa and helps us to fight environmental degradation and maintain favourable temperatures in this area. In fact even those years when the larger part of Zimbabwe is drought stricken, we still manage to harvest something to eat from our fields and gardens. This is because sometimes rain may fall around here only to bear that in the lowlands down there (pointing low-lying areas in the far north) they did not receive even a single drop. I believe it is mainly because we have managed to keep our forests here unlike in the areas down there where these days you can hardly encounter a fully grown up tree.

Besides such reports as these, during my fieldwork I observed that the Norumedzo Area is not only rich in *harurwa*, but a variety of fruits, with many indigenous fruits such as *Uapaca kirkiana* (*mazhanje*), *Ficus ingens* (*shavi*), and many others flourishing in the *jiri*. I also observed that soil erosion was not as severe as many other parts of Zimbabwe I have observed over the years. All this was possible mainly because of the local conservation practices of the Varumedzo.

Aesthetic, educational and cultural values

The other opportunities provided by the Norumedzo *Jiri* include its aesthetic, its social cohesion and its cultural and educational value. In terms of aesthetics, the *jiri* is such a beautiful scene that anyone who passes by the area can hardly afford not to give a gaze, perhaps except if one is blind. From data gathered through interviews during fieldwork in the Norumedzo, quite a number of people from all parts of the country had visited the *jiri* just to appreciate it and observe the activities therein by the locals especially during *harurwa* season. Chief Norumedzo's eldest son, for instance, reported:

Because of our jiri here, we receive a lot of visitors from all over the country and even from abroad who come for various reasons. Those from abroad, especially South Africa, normally come to purchase harurwa. Others within the boundaries normally come both to appreciate the jiri and to buy harurwa. The jiri attracts all kind of people, educated and uneducated, rich and poor.

What the Chief's son and others reported agrees with what I personally witnessed in the Norumedzo during fieldwork. I witnessed visitors from Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), Harare as well as those from Great Zimbabwe National Monument (GZNM), Masvingo. Both came in May to interview Chief Norumedzo on the cultural values attached to the *jiri* and how he and his people conserve the *jiri*. It was revealed during this interview that culturally the *jiri* helps the Norumedzo people to maintain their social cohesion and respect their cultural values, especially those associated with the *jiri*. The documentary was broadcast on Zimbabwe

Television (ZTV) programme known as *Around Zimbabwe* thrice in July and August 2012. Those from GZNM considered the *jiri* as one of the five cultural heritage sites in Masvingo Province. I interviewed the leader of the team from GZNM, Mr Nemerai who had this to say:

Norumedzo Jiri has great significant cultural and spiritual value accorded to it by our organisation besides other many benefits the locals get from it. In fact, the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) – the state-based heritage organisation mandated by the government to look after heritage in Zimbabwe – considers the Norumedzo Jiri as a heritage site in top five in the southern region of the country.

As previously highlighted, the Norumedzo *Jiri* also has educational value attached to it. Students from primary, secondary and tertiary institutions across the country visit the *jiri* to learn more about the conservation practices in the area. During my twelve and half months stay in the Norumedzo, I witnessed two primary schools visit the area – Museti and Norumedzo. The former visited the *jiri* once and the latter twice with their grade 6 and 7 pupils for their Environmental Science studies. All this suffice to say the Norumedzo *Jiri* has opened up opportunities in areas of education, aesthetic and culture.

The harurwa economy in Zimbabwe and the Southern African region

Harurwa are an important food and source of some income for people in the Norumedzo Communal Area. For this reason, in Zimbabwe *harurwa* have earned a modicum of respect as a source of livelihood especially from people in South-eastern Zimbabwe. The observations I made during fieldwork, thus, revealed that *harurwa* remain an important source of livelihood for the Norumedzo locals, and people want to conserve the forest partly because they want to maintain the presence of *harurwa*.

As a source of livelihood for people in south-eastern Zimbabwe and the Southern African region, particularly the Ndau in Western Mozambique and the Venda and Tsonga in South Africa, *harurwa* have been perceived as a source of income generation for many people's households. As such, there are visible economic flows in the region especially across the aforementioned countries as is demonstrated by data presented in the ensuing paragraphs.

To increase their annual incomes from *harurwa* selling, most 'local' *harurwa* traders in the Norumedzo Area have established social networks with buyers from across the region, especially Mozambique and South Africa. Mrs Mabhodho Mugumisi is one of the local *harurwa* traders who established networks with a buyer from Mozambique. In an interview with her, Mrs Mugumisi

commented on how her annual income has increased since she started dealing with buyers from abroad:

I am happy the demand for harurwa is increasing in sub-Saharan Africa. I now sell some of harurwa to people from outside Zimbabwe. This is helping greatly in increasing my annual incomes ... Since I started dealing with buyers abroad in 2009, my annual sales have risen sharply. I sell some of my harurwa to a Mozambican and South African buyers and I am satisfied with the exchanging deals we make.

Table 5 below shows Mrs Mugumisi's estimated annual income from *harurwa* sales from the year 2008-2011. She started dealing with *harurwa* buyers from Southern African region, particularly Mozambique and South Africa in 2009. The years from 1993 – 2007 were times of chieftainship crisis in Norumedzo area up until 2008 when traditional restrictions and control were resuscitated after the intervention of the Rural District Development Committee (RDDC) and Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP). See Table 5 below for estimated annual income from one of the *harurwa* harvester and seller in the Norumedzo.

Year	US\$
2008	80
2009	150
2010	250
2011	250

Table 5: Estimated harurwa annual income for Mrs Mugumisi for years 2008 – 2011.

While the above may appear to be too small amount of money, by Zimbabwean rural standards US\$250, for example, is considered a lot of money given that there are very few such sources of livelihoods in rural areas (for instance, Norumedzo) with which one could afford to generate such amounts of money. In the rural areas, one could afford to buy all the basics for her [his] family. Also, considering that in the *jiri* 3 cups of *harurwa* cost US\$1, US\$250 is an amount that one could get after harvesting lots and lots of *harurwa*. I should be quick to point out that besides depending on *harurwa* as a source of livelihood, Mrs Mugumisi revealed that she also depended on farming.

Mrs Mugumisi recalled that in 2010 and 2011, she had a particularly good annual income from *harurwa* sales because there were good rainfalls and she had already established networks with buyers from abroad.

In another case study on *harurwa* flows in the region, James, one of my research assistants informed that he normally deals with *harurwa* buyers from the Republic of South Africa. Sometimes the buyers come, but sometimes they just call that they meet at Musina, that is the Zimbabwe/South Africa boarder. I listened as James told me about his *harurwa* social networking: “I really get a lot of money from *harurwa* harvests. I am lucky that I managed to network with some buyers from South Africa. They are really good. Sometimes they come over here, but in others they simply call ... When they call we meet at Musina where they would pay for all the *harurwa* I bring them including my transport costs”.

In Table 6 below, James estimated his annual income from *harurwa* sales from year 2008 – 2011.

Year	US\$
2008	150
2009	350
2010	500
2011	500

Table 6: Estimated harurwa annual income for James for the years 2008 – 2011.

Through *harurwa* selling particularly for the years 2010 and 2011, James told me, he managed to build a two bedroomed house with poles and dagga under corrugated iron for his parents. I wanted to understand why in years 2008 and 2009, James, as with Mrs Mugumisi, obtained fairly low annual income from *harurwa* sales while in the years 2010 and 2011 his annual sales rose sharply. Below are the reasons given by James:

From 2007 backwards, I am not very sure up to which year, there were chieftainship succession conflicts (discussed in chapter 5) which resulted in the loss of control in harurwa harvesting in the jiri. 2008 is when things normalised in the jiri. That year I couldn't get much from harurwa sales because it was before establishing social networks and markets, especially with buyers from other countries. Also, things were not good politically as we could be disturbed by political violence in our community now and then. In 2009, I managed to network with two harurwa buyers from South Africa, namely Ntoko and Mary. Unfortunately, that year we received low rainfall amounts which resulted in low harurwa harvests. In 2010 and 2011, there were good rainfalls and I managed to get some considerable annual income from both local sales and those to harurwa buyers from other countries.

As James revealed above, the political instability during the year 2008 resulted in him obtaining low annual income from *harurwa* sales. Indeed, the year 2008 is known for Zimbabwe as a ‘year

of crisis'. By crisis, I mean "a situation whereby socio-economic equilibrating mechanisms have broken down, and some force external to the prevailing systematic logic must be invoked to restore stability" (Bond 2001: 5). This means that in a crisis, basic goods and even services become scarce on the formal market, and inflation shoots up. During the 2008 Zimbabwean crisis, for example, fuel, food stuff, and other such basic commodities became acutely scarce on the formal market. They could only resurface on the black market where they were sold at exorbitant prices (see Coltart 2008; Maanda and Tsunga 2007). Inflation also went up to as high as 2.5 million per cent a year by June 2008 (see Hanke 2008; Kairiza 2009), one other reason why *harurwa* traders such as James could not get much from *harurwa* sales.

Harurwa presence in Bikita has generated regional marketing networks. During fieldwork in the Norumedzo, I observed two women who identified themselves as Kholeka and Rosy from the South African Limpopo Province. They came to Norumedzo on two occasions to buy *harurwa*. When I asked them why they came to Norumedzo to buy *harurwa* when they also exist in the Limpopo Province, Kholeka had this to say: "Yes there are *harurwa* in our province, but they are not as abundant as they are in here (in Norumedzo). Besides, the Norumedzo *harurwa* are fatter and tastier than the Limpopo *harurwa*. I can't explain why, but even our customers prefer the Norumedzo *harurwa* to Limpopo *harurwa*. They are just different."

The monetisation of *harurwa* does not mean that *harurwa* are only traded for money. Barter trading with other commodities is also prevalent and has been practiced for generations in the Norumedzo. As one of the respondents, Sekuru Nyenya reported:

When I was a young man, harurwa were not sold for money. Harurwa trading with money only started in the 1960s. I was still a teenage then when I witnessed some two white men buying harurwa using money. They were from South Africa. They paid a ticky to my father for one small cup (an equivalent to 100g). By the 1980s, the same cup was now sold at 20c. Currently, the same cup is sold at 50c/R5 or US\$1 for two at Nyika Growth Point and US\$1 for 3 cups in the jiri. Before all this, we all knew in this area that harurwa was sold through barter trade with products such as cereals, beer, livestock, clothes, poultry and so on. So the barter trading you see in this whole area including jiri is not a new phenomenon. That is how harurwa were traded in the past, especially before the coming in of the European settlers in Zimbabwe.

Indeed, though the introduction of money in *harurwa* trading has facilitated exchanges between dealers, many people, especially the old generation, prefer barter trading to monetary exchanges. During fieldwork, I observed several *vakweguru* (senior citizens/elderly people) coming to the *jiri* on different occasions to do barter trading. They brought products such as cereals, fruits, clothes, torches and groceries to exchange with *harurwa*. On one day, I observed two old women

and a man arriving at the *musasa*. They had some mealie cobs for *maputi* (popcorn), sweet potatoes and avocado pears for the policemen and administrators at the *musasa*. I counted 22 mealie cobs (*miguri*), the sweet potatoes (*mbambaira*) basket full, and 12 avocado peas. When they arrived, we greeted them and then they said to the chief *harurwa* administrator: “*Tinotsvakawo muriwo. Shawo yedu iyi*” (We are looking for relish. This is what we have (referring to their parcels). The chief administrator answered: “*Zvakanaka. Maita chinbu chakanaka chose kuvigira vana venyu chokudya*” (That’s fine. You have done a very good thing to bring your children some food). Each of the three old people were given 2kg full of *harurwa*. They were all happy as they received their shares smiling. “*Maita basa nensavi*” (Thank you so much for the relish). They thanked at once clapping their hands. In the Norumedzo, as in the Shona culture in general, when one is offered a present, gift or something important, they demonstrate their sense of appreciation by clapping their hands while uttering the words “*maita basa*” (thank you).

In another incident, I witnessed two *harurwa* administrators, Mr Pio Roza and Mr Philmon Magare, negotiating with a local man to exchange a male goat with two fifty kilograms bags of live *harurwa*. They prepared the first bag of live *harurwa* in my presence. I observed that it was not 50kgs in terms of real quantity, but in terms of the container used – it was a used 50 kg sack of mealie-meal.

I also observed that a 2kg of sugar which sold at US\$2, 20 – US\$2, 50 attracts (*zvikapu zvisere*) 8 lids/cups of *harurwa* when barter exchanged with *harurwa* in the *jiri*. I used a scale to measure the quantity of *harurwa* in one lid and found out that *chikapu* (one lid) full of *harurwa* weighed 100g. See the picture (figure 18) of the lid below used when selling *harurwa*.



Figure 18: Lid (chikapu) used to sell harurwa.

In this study, I use the term lid and cup interchangeably as these are also used as such (to mean *chikapu*) in the Norumedzo and selling points in the Masvingo Province. Below (table 7) are some of the items and exchange rates used in barter trade the *jiri*:

ITEM	QUANTITY OF <i>HARURWA</i>	APPROXIMATE VALUE ¹⁶	US\$
Used pair of trousers	8 cups	2.70	
Used shirts	8 cups	2.70	
New tie	3 cups	1	

¹⁶ Note that the US\$ approximate value has been calculated using the 2012 prices of *harurwa* in the *jiri* where 3 cups of *harurwa* costed 1US\$.

Used women blousers	7 cups	2. 30
Used jacket(s)	8 cups	2.70
2kg of sugar	8 cups	2.70
Bar of washing soap	4 cups	1.30
Used pair of shoes	9 cups	3
Torch	6 cups	2

Table 7: Items and exchange rates used in barter trade in the *jiri*

While the above were the measures commonly used for barter trading exchanges only in the Norumedzo *Jiri*, I observed that there was no clear cut measure in terms of *harurwa* quantities when old people bring items such as sweet potatoes, maize cobs (for roasting as *maputi*), and fruits. The old people were always given fairly large quantities of *harurwa* in relation to the ‘normal’ exchange rates used in the *jiri*. This showed that the Norumedzo people respect and value their *vagweru* (village elders/senior citizens) so much as they consider them to be the custodians of traditions and customs that sustain *jiri* and *harurwa* in Norumedzo.

Besides, the cultural, spiritual and aesthetic values associated with the Norumedzo *Jiri*, there is a sense in which one could say that the *jiri* also has some educational values attached to it given that some people come to do research in the area. I am a case in point as I carried out twelve and half months of ethnographic research in the area. This shows that the Norumedzo *Jiri* has the potential to lure people from all walks of life.

In this chapter, I have discussed the opportunities and challenges associated with the *jiri* and conservation practices in Norumedzo Communal Area. This was done with a view that does not romanticise conservation practices in Norumedzo, but offers a balanced story of the Norumedzo conservation culture, intended to open up avenues through which dialogue with Western conservation practices could be facilitated.

CONCLUSION: Theoretical Contribution and Evaluation of the Study

Having ethnographically and critically explored possibilities for the mutual, symbiotic coexistence of humans, insects and forests, this study has engaged with post-humanism and relational ontology. This was not done to legitimise these theories in view of the data gathered during fieldwork but to critique them in relationship to conservation practices and relational networks in the Norumedzo Communal Area. While appreciating some aspects of the aforementioned network theories (posthumanism and relational ontology), this study has argued for the enhancement of these theories by advancing engagement zones perspective as an alternative for explaining the interrelationships between people and other beings involved in the conservation of forests such as the Norumedzo *Jiri*. In this regard, the contribution of this work is threefold: to provide insights into environmental and community management of forests; to contribute to the anthropological shift that rethinks the enlightenment modernist binary of nature and culture and, to provide insights about *harurwa*. Below, I explain these in detail.

Insights about environmental conservation and community management of forests

Using the present case study (Norumedzo), this study has challenged a prevalent view of the decade from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s by some scholars and organisations (Brundtland 1987; Leornard 1989; World Bank 1992) that due to poverty, people in the rural areas can do nothing but participate in environmental degradation thereby causing natural resource depletion. Brundtland (1987: 28) notes:

Those who are poor and hungry will often destroy their immediate environment in order to survive: they will cut down forests; their livestock will overgraze grasslands; they will over use marginal lands; and in growing numbers they will crowd into congested cities. The cumulative effect of these changes is so far-reaching as to make poverty itself a major global scourge.

Yet the above remark is contrary to the Norumedzo case study where I observed during fieldwork that many of the rural poor in that community, the Varumedzo, “had transformed into environmental activists due to their close relation to the ecosystems which recognised that the survival capacities of the poor are directly threatened by environmental degradation” (to quote Ellis 2000: 120). The close relationship between the Varumedzo and their environment as observed during fieldwork, resonates with the findings by some scholars, who using fieldwork data gathered in some poverty stricken rural communities of the Philippines (a country known

worldwide for its severe poverty rates) made the same claim about the rural poor (see Ellis 2000; Broad 1994). Contrary to the thesis that poverty is the cause of environmental degradation, Broad and Ellis revealed the opposite in view of the Philippines where the rural poor protected their forests, thereby challenging the long-standing view that poverty is the cause of resource depletion and environmental degradation in rural areas. My observation in the Norumedzo, as that of Broad and Ellis in the Philippines, implies that environment conservation does not depend on development or economic growth as this is normally damaging to the environment given that it involves massive and extensive extraction of natural resources and labour. The point I make is that in contexts like Norumedzo (as in the Philippines), growth does not become the sole reason for conservation; hence the important contribution of this work.

Contributing to the anthropological shift

This study forms part of a shift in Anthropology to rethink the ways in which the enlightenment modernist binary of nature and culture has served to confine anthropological attention to the social. In the past and until at least the mid-1990s, Anthropology as a discipline has always been preoccupied with the social, cultural and economic, thereby assuming a divide between nature and society. In this study, I have argued that such a divide is artificial and that it impedes understanding environmentalities as has been proven by the emerging critical body of literature in the post-humanities (Haraway 1997, 2006, 2007; Hayles 1999; Bostrom 2003; Tsing 2008; Nayar 2009; Lien & Law 2010; Wolfe 2010; Raffles 2010). This post-humanities literature, together with the present work, has argued that there are close connections and relationships between people, animals, state, and ‘things’. Yet in realising that the post-humanities advanced by many of the post-humanities scholars (Haraway 2006, 2007; Bostrom 2003; Nayar 2009; Lien & Law 2010) is radical and with criticism elsewhere (see Simon 2003; Nayar 2009), this work has proposed an enhanced post-humanities that does not undermine human dignity or threaten the essence of humanity in its advocacy for social connections and relationships between humans and other beings. In so doing this work proposes to go beyond what Ingold (2011: 63) calls “meshworks”, meaning entangled lines of life, growth and movement, and Fairhead and Leach’s (2005) conception of social networks as the web of relationships among people spanning familial bonds and voluntary associations. Going beyond Ingold’s meshworks and Fairhead and Leach’s social networks, in this work I have proposed what I have tentatively referred to as “engagement zones perspective” in which relationships and connections are not only limited to the so-called “living” and/or people but also to other beings or things. Mindful of the limitations of network

theories such as relational ontologies and post-humanism, I have argued that engagement zones are points or zones where different ‘things’/beings/entities/social actors interact, associate, disassociate, meet and part freely or otherwise. They are more of “political grounds” or playing grounds where opponents play to win each other, and associates (say from the same team) meet to improve their skills. In such zones, therefore, antagonisms or co-operations, merging/integrations or disconnections, and symmetries or asymmetries are normally experienced. As such, engagement zones can be either productive and helpful or counter-productive and destructive, depending on how people and other beings interact. Further, I have argued that in proposing engagement zones, I seek to rethink the division of the world into subjects and objects, that is, into humans and things or creatures, categories which I think can possibly meet in engagement zones in a productive (or counter-productive way) especially in issues of conservation. Given that my engagement zones perspective privileges fluidity, interdependence, conviviality and co-existence, it bolsters my argument that divisions of the world into categories limit our understanding of the world in terms of the interactions, interconnectedness and relationships between humans and other beings/social actors/things.

I have argued in this work that conservation practices linked to local practices, values and knowledge, as well as forest insects, especially *harurwa*, are some of the least researched (see also Raffles 2010) in Zimbabwe and beyond, yet their contribution cannot be underestimated. I have, for example, underscored that there are few (if any) anthropological studies done on forest insects, particularly *harurwa*, and that those researches that have examined environmental issues in rural areas (for example, by Brundtland 1978; Leonard 1989) have not done so conclusively. In terms of the former, I have given the example of Norumedzo Communal Area where *harurwa* are an abundant resource, yet it was confirmed during fieldwork that no other researcher had come into the area before to carry out anthropological research on *harurwa*. I also have not come across a single systematic anthropological work on *harurwa* in the Norumedzo or elsewhere. This is in spite of *harurwa*’s contribution to ecosystem services and human livelihoods for the Norumedzo people, and also that there are other examples of insects that have acted (and continue to act) as social companions elsewhere.¹⁷ This means that the place of forest insects as part of the environment and companions of human beings cannot be underestimated; hence this research is an attempt to close this research gap.

¹⁷ For more information on the contribution of insects on human livelihoods, see the introduction of this dissertation. Also, see Kosek (2010) and Lockwood (2008) who discuss the use of bees and beetles in warfare and prisons respectively.

Insights about harurwa

Given that the other objective of this study was to explore and uncover hidden truths, I discovered many [hidden] truths about *harurwa*, some of which have never been mentioned elsewhere and others challenge (or correct) the misrepresentations by previous research on *harurwa*. For instance, I confirmed during fieldwork that *harurwa*, which is at the centre of this study, are winged forest insects in a family of large stinkbugs classified by entomologists as *Tessaratomidae* or inflated stinkbugs (Picker et al 2004; Schuh and Slater 1995; Ho and Chen 2010; Teffo 2006; Imms et al 1977). Through careful and intense attention to their morphology and variety, I learnt from the local taxonomy of *harurwa* by the Varumedzo that there are different kinds of *harurwa* depending on their size, colour and taste when eaten. I learnt the names of *harurwa* according to their colour, size and taste from my key informants. Three types of *harurwa* were distinguished namely, *harurwa chipembenene* (*harurwa* with white tiny spots beneath their wings), *harurwa benzi* (*harurwa* with white and black tiny spots – they are smelly), and *harurwa* (those that are wholly green in colour). Though the three types of *harurwa* are all edible, *harurwa* are most preferred as they are not smelly and are the tastiest of the three types elaborated above. I further observed that all these three types of *harurwa* come to the Norumedzo *Jiri* at the same time of the year and they stay in the same tree species. The living together of these different kinds of *harurwa* depicts their social character.

In addition to the aforementioned observations, I was surprised to note that though in most cases, I found *harurwa* in swarms in the green trees, most of the tree leaves were intact and not destroyed or eaten away (see Chapter 2). When I asked my informants why was it like that when the *harurwa* are always in the trees, one of the *harurwa* administrators, Mr Mugumisi told me, “*harurwa* are mysterious insects. They don’t feed on plant leaves as locusts do, but only feed on dew and rain water. If you see any leaf destroyed, it’s not *harurwa* but locusts which normally come into season at the same time with *harurwa*”. On hearing this, I spent a lot of time making efforts to observe for myself if this was true, and for all the time I stayed in Norumedzo, I never witnessed any *harurwa* feeding on organic matter (tree leaves or vegetation in general). Besides, Mr Mugumisi’s words were confirmed by all the people I interviewed on this subject. This observation was critical as it challenges Mjele (1934) and Cuthbertson’s (1934) respective assertions, from a survey they carried out, that *harurwa* feed on the leaves of *muzhanje* (*Uapaca kirkiana*), and that *harurwa* appear in swarms on certain trees *umbobobobo* (in Ndebele) (*Uapaca kirkiana*). I observed that *harurwa* are not always found in swarms and are not selective in terms

of the trees they habitat – they can live in any tree; hence some of the hidden truths that challenged previous research on *harurwa*.

In view of the life cycle of *harurwa* in the Norumedzo, my observations (during fieldwork) as a lay entomologist indicate that the life cycle of *harurwa* is the same as that of locusts. I drew this conclusion after observing that when [officially] off-season, that is, between September and February, *harurwa* no longer stay in the tall trees found in the *jiri* as they do when in season – between March and August. Instead, they were found mainly in the tall grass and shrubs lying idle. On careful examination of their bodies, I observed that most of the *harurwa* found on shrubs and grass during off-season period already had numerous eggs in their abdomen. The eggs were yellow in colour. This observation made me believe that *harurwa* lay their eggs under the ground surface just as locusts do. It appeared to me that the period between September and February is time between which eggs are laid, hatched and the larvae undergo the same process as locusts until March when the pupae will have fully developed into *harurwa*. This observation was confirmed by my chief informants who reported that every year, *harurwa* start their season in March. In 2012, the period in which I was carrying out fieldwork in the area, *harurwa* season started on the 13th of March. Out of these hidden truths unraveled during fieldwork, there is no doubt that life cycle of *harurwa* in the Norumedzo (or elsewhere) could now be known; hence the contribution of this work.

Implications of the study

This research has various implications for resource management in rural communities, for academics in conservation sciences, and for further research on natural resource conservation in rural communities. In this section I elaborate on these three major implications of this study.

Implications for natural resource management in rural communities

What is important for people in Norumedzo, as elsewhere, is that conservation of natural resources has impacted their lives in different ways, and in many cases improved their lives. As such, researching and writing about conservation practices, as the Norumedzo's, without acknowledging and commenting on the failures, successes and positive spin offs as well as experiences of local people would be to write an incomplete story. On this note, the introduction, and chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this dissertation suggest that there are a number of outcomes that resulted and are indeed resulting from Norumedzo *Jiri*. The introduction and chapter 3 of this dissertation have, for example, shown how *harurwa* protection not only helps to

conserve forests, but is part of a way of being in the world and thinking about environments that is at odds with the state's modernist assumptions that insects are of little value, and are not really worth conserving. In chapter 5, it has been shown how local members of Norumedzo Community benefit economically, culturally and socially from *harurwa* and the *jiri* in their area (besides the chieftainship succession conflicts discussed in chapter 4 as negatively impacting on Norumedzo conservation practices). Such documented benefits could influence the direction that the national conservation project should take in the future, if the present research is seriously considered in conservation circles in Zimbabwe and elsewhere.

Implications for academics in Conservation Sciences

In spite of the increasing importance of personal knowledge in the Conservation Sciences and Environmental Anthropology, limited academic research has been done on how humans and other beings' relations, interactions and networks help academics to generate new knowledge and perspectives on natural resource conservation. Understanding relationships between humans and other beings, as well as between diverse epistemologies, can be drawn upon in the development of conservation initiatives that are more inclusive and responsive to the needs of all actors in the environment. This is notwithstanding the fact that some scholars (Miller 1983; Singer 1993; Boss 1999) in conservation sciences are ambivalent about recognising and promoting mutual relationships between humans and other beings, citing rural communities' perceivably disruption of nature with inappropriate use and management of natural resources. Boss (1999: 25, emphasis original), for example, has argued that other beings such as "animals lack the capacity for autonomous moral judgments *and reasoning* such that they don't deserve any moral consideration".

Yet, in this dissertation one of my central arguments is that understanding the nexus between interactional social networks by humans and other beings would be useful in deriving new knowledge on conservation that is more democratic. A greater pursuit of such knowledge has the potential to open up lateral forms of discourse in rural communities where natural resources are found, thereby making local members of the communities more active, and as self-regulated agents in the conservation process of natural resources. This could be useful for fostering more critical discourses on conservation of natural resources based on post-humanities approach and border thinking to conservation that defy paradigmatic categorisations by modernist inventions such as humans versus nonhumans, science versus indigenous knowledge etc. For example, in the introduction and chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation, I have shown the sustainability of a post-humanities approach that recognises mutual dialogue and interactions

between humans and other beings as well as between diverse epistemologies. This way, the study offers scholars in Conservation Sciences and Environmental Anthropology an opportunity to rethink conservation strategies that do not value mutual dialogue and interactions. Using the case study of Norumedzo Communal Area, I have shown some of the negative outcomes of conservation strategies that do not recognise dialogue. Against this backdrop, I infer from the post-humanities approach that when the monologic voice of academic sources (scholars in conservation sciences) in natural resource conservation is replaced by dialogic discourse based on democratic thinking and thoughtfulness of argument, their convincing nature, and substantiation based on empirical evidence, conservation sciences become a more encompassing, socially engaging and meaningful practice with more positive impact on both human and other beings' lives.

Implications for further research on natural resource conservation in rural communities

The main argument of (formal) scientific conservationists against conservation by rural communities has been that despite efforts by national governments to bring positive social change to conservation in rural areas, rural communities have done more harm than good (CEAD, cited in Jones 2004:92). Hardin (1968) for example, has popularised his “tragedy of the commons” in a move that undermine resource use and management by rural communities in African countries. In his theory, Hardin argues that an individual resource user, as a rational being, is inclined to exploit as much as possible of the common property resource before someone else does. Given that common property resources belong to the community (where the resources are found) as a whole, Hardin argues, nobody is motivated to take responsibility for them. As a result, common property resources are prone to over-exploitation, what Hardin himself calls “the tragedy of the commons”.

Hardin's (1968)'s theory, however, has been criticised over the years for its failure to distinguish between common access (resources not managed and with no property rights and rules) and common property resources (managed resources with property rights and rules) (Cousins 2000). The other criticism that has been levelled against Hardin is that his theory is ethnocentric as it emphasises competition rather than cooperation and also assumes the supremacy of individualism rather than communitarianism (Berkes, 1989; Berkes and Farvar 1989), which many African communities emphasise.

Despite criticism that Hardin has received over the years, many scholars in conservation sciences have continued to criticise resource conservation by rural communities on the premise

that poor as many of them are they are likely to over-exploit natural resources (cf. Jones 2004a, 2004b).

Yet, while conservation by communities has been criticised for different reasons, this study (basing on the findings during my twelve and half months ethnographic research in Norumedzo in south-eastern Zimbabwe) shows that if real support by national governments is offered to rural communities, conservation in those communities is potentially promising. Having come up with different findings from the above premise, it is apparent that assertions by some scholars (given above) against conservation in rural communities warrant more research on natural resource conservation in rural communities; hence the implication of this study for further research on conservation of natural resources in the rural communities.

Validity and reliability of findings

The epistemological stance of this work is critical and the research design is ethnographic study. My interpretations of relations, interactions and networks in natural resource conservation in the Norumedzo are thus consistent with this perspective, especially bearing in mind that the “selection and presentation of facts in an ethnography is a result of analysis and interpretation and not simply a record of observations made during the anthropologist’s fieldwork” (Jacobson 1991b: 7). On the same note, assessing the validity and reliability of this work necessitates adoption of the same research approach for any other researcher to arrive at the same findings. Such is the passion expressed by scholars like Gupta who in his quest to marry theory with practice or ethnography urged ethnographers to ascertain that when doing research “descriptions should be clear enough that 50 or 100 years later one may still come back to it and ask new questions from the material and the material be able to give you answers” (Notes from Gupta’s Presentation 2011). Thus to assess the validity and reliability of the findings of this research as a whole, the following are reviewed:

Credibility

Credibility and validity are closely related such that more often than not they are used interchangeably (see Polit and Hungler 1999). The question of credibility of a particular research is often critical in determining the impact of research. According to Polit and Hungler (1999), credibility deals with the focus of the research and refers to confidence in how well data and processes of analysis address the intended focus. For the duo, the first question concerning credibility arises when making a decision about the focus of the study, selection of context, participants and approach to gathering data. This understanding is echoed by Graneheim and

Lundman (2004) who noted that credibility of research findings also deals with how well categories and themes cover data, that is, no relevant data have been inadvertently or systematically excluded or irrelevant data included. With regard to my research in the Norumedzo, the use of ethnography was important given that conservation by rural communities is often despised due to lack of comprehensive studies by researchers. As such, the deployment of ethnographic methodologies and the choice of a case study in a rural community increased the possibility of shedding light on the research questions, and to document verbatim extracts of interview transcriptions and debriefings, particularly those that reflected popular opinions on specific matters, highlighting differences and concurrence of participants' points of view. These methodologies also afforded me the opportunity to insert images of my fieldwork ethnographic evidence - some pictures that I took during fieldwork in the Norumedzo. All this was done to ensure credibility of this research, and was in agreement with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) critical observation that credibility can be ensured by availing others with the raw data so that they can analyse it through member checks in which research subjects are required to corroborate findings.

Given that in ethnographic research the research participants' perspective of reality is central to the guarantee of the credibility of research, after my transcription, gathering of data from ethnographic methodologies and analysis, key respondents were requested to review and validate the findings. This was undertaken to cross check whether findings and overall analysis adequately reflected research subjects' perspectives and views on matters investigated during research. This was also done to ensure that the data gathered during fieldwork were rich and convincing enough, even to strangers in the discipline of issues investigated. This concurred with Patton's (1990) observation that credibility depends less on sample size than on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher. Also, the other technique I deployed to ensure credibility of my research was the use of multiple sources of data to corroborate evidence throughout my study, ranging from life histories of the local people, interviews, informal discussions, FGDs and participatory observations.

Dependability

Reliability and dependability are closely related and sometimes used interchangeably. This is echoed by Trochim (2001) who reiterates that dependability parallels reliability in traditional criteria for judging quantitative research. The general way of testing reliability as with dependability problem is to make many operational steps and methodologies as possible, and to conduct research as if someone were always looking over your shoulder (Yin 1994). To this

effect, steps of research design, research subject selection, data collection, analysis and validation were elaborately explained throughout this thesis so that readers can establish how findings were developed and arrived at. For example, I explained in chapter 1 that during my fieldwork in the Norumedzo data collection was done using several ethnographic methodologies such as FGDs, listening to stories, participatory observations, informal discussions, interviews and so on.

Limitations of the study

While this study is important in many ways as has been explained above, it also has its own limitations. The first limitation of this study is that though *harurwa* exist in many parts of Zimbabwe such as Mukanganwi, Bota, Glen Liven, Chipinge and Chinhoyi, the study only focused on Norumedzo. As has been alluded to above, the focus on Norumedzo was premised on the fact that this is where *harurwa* exist in abundance, where *harurwa* rituals and traditions are still followed, and that no other ethnographic research on *harurwa* and conservation in the area was carried out before the present research. Yet, studying *harurwa* and conservation in the other aforementioned areas could have been critical in making a comparative analysis with the studied area, hence the limitation of this research.

The other limitation of this research is that it did not investigate conservation of resources in urban areas. This was because of the complexity of identifying relatively small communities in urban areas where locals' daily practices, humans and other beings' mutual relations and interactions are observable. In fact, most urban communities do not comprise people of the same culture and who are somehow permanent to that geographical area. I, however, inferred from my findings from rural communities that where relations and interactions between human and other such social actors are considered, conservation is likely to be more successful than where such relations and interactions are disregarded and/or relegated as useless.

The third limitation of this study is that though the Chief of the Norumedzo people of south-eastern Zimbabwe played a fundamental role in leading natural resource conservation in the Norumedzo Community, his legitimacy as an acting chief was not thoroughly studied because I considered this as very sensitive issue with the potential to threaten and curtail my research in the area, especially in a politically volatile country such as Zimbabwe. I conceive this as limitation to the extent that the power and authority to punish other members of the ruling family that violate traditional restrictions and customs associated with resource exploitation in the *jiri* could have contributed significantly to the conservation of the *jiri*.

Lastly, this study did not look into what may possibly happen to forest conservation practices and management system in the Norumedzo Communal Area if there happens to be an upsurge in the *harurwa* market; hence its limitation. Yet, based on the findings of this study, it has been demonstrated that enhanced post-humanism and relational ontology, as practiced by the Varumedzo of south-eastern Zimbabwe, could be a window to understanding conservation and promoting sustainable resource conservation in rural communities.

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